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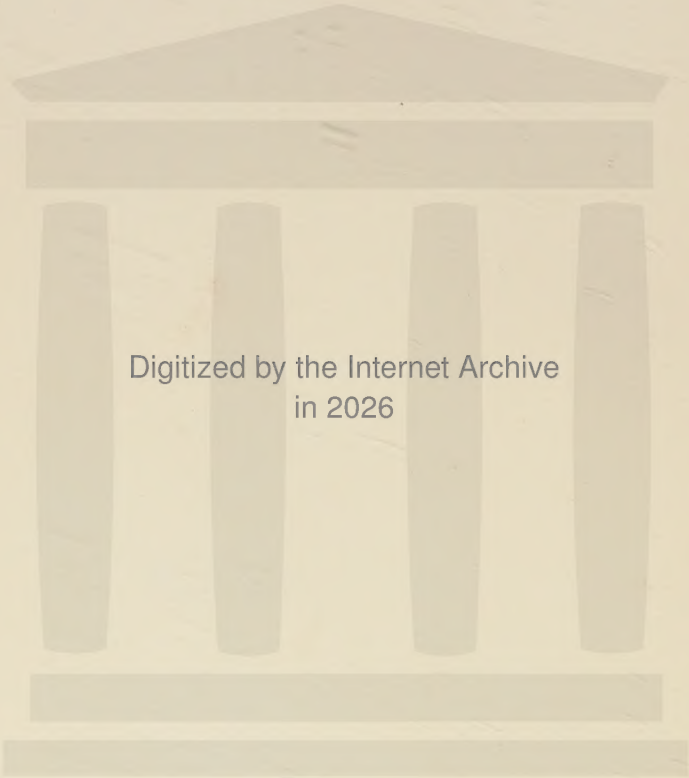

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The Collected Works of
Arthur Symons

Volume 6

Tragedies

Tragedies: Volume One

by Arthur Symons

1 9 2 4

London: Martin Secker

Printed in Great Britain.
London: Martin Secker (Ltd.) 1924.

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TRISTAN AND ISEULT

TO

ELEONORA DUSE

Non sentite il sangue delle rose stillare
Tra le mie dita nelle vostre due mani?

TRISTANO E ISOTTA, *Atto III.*

THE PERSONS

KING MARK OF CORNWALL.
THE KING OF IRELAND.
TRISTAN : *Nephew of King Mark of Cornwall.*
MERIADOC : *Nephew of the Queen of Ireland.*
MELOT : *A Fool at the court of King Mark.*
A PHYSICIAN.
THE QUEEN OF IRELAND.
ISEULT OF IRELAND : *Daughter of the Queen.*
ISEULT OF BRITTANY : *Cousin of Iseult of Ireland.*
BRANGAENE : *A lady in attendance on Iseult of Ireland.*
YGRAINE, ELAINE, IMOGEN } *Ladies in attendance on Iseult of Brittany.*
A CHILD.
LORDS AND ATTENDANTS.

The action takes place in Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany, and on the sea.

ACT I

The scene represents a large room in the palace of the KING OF IRELAND. *There are vacant seats in the foreground on the right. In the background are two long broad steps leading to an inner room, which is seen as through the proscenium of a theatre. Women are seated just inside, working at embroidery frames.*

In the front is ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *working: behind her* BRANGAENE. ISEULT OF IRELAND *is standing beside her, looking at the work. As the curtain goes up, a large door on the left is opened and the* QUEEN *enters,* MERIADOC *following her as if in eager conversation. They cross to the seats and sit down.* ISEULT OF IRELAND *comes down the steps and across the stage, with an eager movement.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Mother, I knew that Tristan would come back.

QUEEN

Why not? These wandering children of the harp
Follow the crying people of the air;
They know their seasons, they return with them.
Tristan will bring his harp into the hall
When he has rested. And now, Meriadoc,
Speak on.

MERIADOC

I say again, the time has come.
It is a year now since my father died;
He was your brother, you have loved him well,
Almost as I have loved him, and I have loved
Your daughter and my father and no more.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why do you speak of me?
[*She sits down, looking away from him.*

MERIADOC

I have said the word,
Which must return to silence. Be it so.
I speak another thing now. I desire
Vengeance for Morolt, blood for Morolt's blood.

QUEEN

And I desire no less, yet, Meriadoc,
Since no man knows the spiller of that blood,
Vengeance is but an arm that smites a sword
Into the empty, dark, and yielding air.

MERIADOC

Give me but leave, and I will find the man.

QUEEN

I will both give you leave, and give you that
Which when you find him shall find out his life

Surer than any hound. Here, take the key,
Iseult: bring me the knife, bring it with care,
You know its secret.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I will bring it, mother.

[She goes back to the inner room, unlocks an oak chest which stands against the side wall, and takes out a sheathed dagger.

[*To* ISEULT OF BRITTANY] What would you do with such
a cruel thing,
Kind cousin Iseult?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Cast it in the sea,
My manly hearted cousin.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*holding it up*]

Is it not strange
That men play such forbidden games with death,
And we too deal the pieces? This rare thing
Will find the heart some woman's heart shall break for.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Why do you take it in your hands?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I? Merely
To take it to my mother.

[She carries it across to her mother, who takes it turns it over, and as she speaks gives it to MERIADOC.

QUEEN

This knife I give you
Has lapped up poison night by night, and slept
Under the moon, and I have watched him sleep.
I give the knife to you : use it but once.

[MERIADOC *takes the knife and holds out the cross-shaped hilt.*

MERIADOC

I swear upon this cross to use the knife
Once, and no more. Cousin, before I go——

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Cousin, no more of that.

MERIADOC

You take me ill.
It is another thing I have to ask.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Where do you go ?

MERIADOC

To Cornwall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

A stern land.
You know not whom you seek ; why do you go ?

MERIADOC

Give me a thing you keep.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What shall I give you ?

MERIADOC

The splinter of the sword that killed my father.
Give it to me, and it shall draw the sword
Out of the deadly iron of the earth
Like a strong loadstone ; it will know its sword.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*after a pause*]

Yes, I will give it to you, Meriadoc.

[*She rises and moves slowly across the stage towards the chest, which she has left open. The door is thrown open and an* ATTENDANT *enters.*

ATTENDANT

Lord Tristan.

[TRISTAN *enters and walks slowly towards the* QUEEN. ISEULT *pauses and half turns, with her hand on the lid of the chest, looking fixedly at* TRISTAN.

QUEEN

In the name of both our lands,
Welcome. A year seems but a day and night,
And I some easy sleeper, since we heard
The voices of your harp among our own.

TRISTAN

Madam, the heaped good wishes of a year,
Longer in absence than its counted days,
Crowd back each other, asking to be first.

[*He turns towards* ISEULT, *who has slowly approached.*

Princess, I buy my welcome at your hands
With songs that I have made for you to sing ;
You loved them once.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I am your pupil still.

[*She goes towards* MERIADOC *as if unconscious of her intention.*

MERIADOC

Iseult ! the gift !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What was it ? I forget.

[*She stands gazing at* TRISTAN *in silence.*

QUEEN

Was the sea fair in coming ?

TRISTAN

Fair and fierce.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

The sea is friends with you.

TRISTAN

I follow it :
I have no other will than the sea's will.

QUEEN

My daughter, sit beside me. You, my lord.
Here.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I must have Iseult of the White Hands.
Come, cousin, leave the armour of the knight :
It is but wool upon a frame ; but here
Is the true knight ; come down and welcome him.

[ISEULT OF BRITTANY *rises slowly, lays down the wool on her embroidery frame, and comes slowly across the stage. The others follow her.* TRISTAN *rises and bows low.*

TRISTAN

I have called off your fingers from some dream
That you were weaving.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I was only weaving
A knight in armour, dying ; there is grass,
An apple orchard, birds singing, and sheep.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Have you not such a story in your songs ?
But not so fair a lady in your land
As this that bears my name !

TRISTAN

Few quite so fair,
For she is fair, yet not as Helen was,
Not as you are.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What is Helen, sir, to me?
But this white cousin Iseult of my name,
Read me this woman, Tristan; read her soul;
Look in her eyes and tell me what she is.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I pray you do not tell me what you see.

TRISTAN

She has the face of one who is content,
Making a little last with loving it.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Is patience, then, the nurse of love? God keep
Such as are patient!

TRISTAN

I have read as well
How earth was crumbled up for Helen's sake
And cast like crumbs to birds.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Is love so cruel?
Is it not only in the song?

QUEEN

My daughter,
Love is more cruel than a savage beast;
Therefore fear love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why, how should the free soul
Fear any power under the firmament?
For there are women who have never feared
The face of steel or face of any man
Or blood or battle or the foam of the sea
When the wind wrings out the sails and washes them.

TRISTAN

It is such women that Love loves to rule.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

How should he rule them? they that do not weave
A knight dying in an orchard, but they can die.

TRISTAN

Yes, die for love: a woman can do that.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

O, any woman! more than die for love.
Tristan, I had an uncle whom I loved
More than I ever shall love man; this brave,
This tender, more than father to me, this
Glory of Ireland, was most foully slain.
[*She starts to her feet.*

If Morolt's murderer stood before me now
As you stand there, I, woman that I am,
(Give me your sword : I do not fear to see
The nakedness of steel : give it to my hand)

[*She takes* TRISTAN'S *sword from him and lifts it in the air.*

I would dare—

[*She looks fixedly at the sword in her hand.*

O, this is some witchcraft. No.
The sword, the sword, it cannot be the sword !

[*She runs to the open chest, takes out the splinter, and fits it to the notch in the sword.*

The sword is whole again. This sacred blood
Make my arm strong that I may drink his blood !
Die Tristan !

[*She comes towards* TRISTAN *with the sword in her hand. All rise.* MERIADOC *puts his hand on his dagger. The* QUEEN *comes forward.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*catching* ISEULT OF IRELAND *and drawing her back*]

Iseult, will you murder him ?
If you are mad, kill me !

QUEEN

Is it not madness ?

TRISTAN

Strike ! I am at your mercy.

QUEEN

Stay, Iseult!

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Mother, look well upon the sword. See now,
Here is the splinter of the sword that killed
Morolt; see how they grow together; see
The sword that Morolt died by.

QUEEN

We have been fooled,
We have given our enemy life.

MERIADOC [*drawing his dagger*]

You gave him life
That death may find him here.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

No, Meriadoc.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What is it to you, Iseult of Brittany,
If this man live or die? No, Meriadoc,
My hand!

TRISTAN

Iseult of Ireland, why do you wait?
Your eyes have stabbed me: finish! you have the sword.

QUEEN

Daughter, put down the sword, he is our guest.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

He has our blood upon him.

QUEEN

He has broken
Our bread. Put down the sword. Tristan, your life
I give you; get you gone out of our gates.
No, stand aside; be silent. All of you
Stand further off and leave us two alone.

[TRISTAN *moves across the stage and stands alone.* MERIADOC *stands apart on the other side, eyeing him. The others go out hastily.* BRANGAENE *lingers by the door.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*as she crosses the stage, half supported by* BRANGAENE]

What will they do to him? Save him for my sake,
Brangaene!

BRANGAENE

I do not need to; he is saved.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What shall we do, mother? O, mother, tell me
Why could I not kill Tristan? I had the will,
And it was not your hand that stayed my hand.

QUEEN

Fate holds the hands of all men in the dark,
And there shall not a drop of blood be shed
Before its time, although we snatch up swords.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Mother, I hate him! he has spilt our blood.
Why is it that my eyes follow his eyes,
As a hound follows his master?

QUEEN

Do not ask:
There is no herb against the eyes of a man,
There is no stone shall turn his eyes aside.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Mother, must we forgive our enemy
And send his feet out of our house alive?

QUEEN

He is our guest; we may not do him harm.
Daughter, if I, that so loved Morolt—blood
Could not wash out the tears I shed for him—
Can, for the honour of our house, forgive
Tristan, who slew him, can you not forgive?
I do not pardon him for pity, no,
But for my troth and honour.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Alas, mother,
That ever I was born to see this day!

MERIADOC [*coming up*]

O Queen, the knife is ready for his throat;
Say but the word, and we are all at peace.

QUEEN

It may not be; but yet I know not well
What must be, in this backward drift of things.
[*While she is speaking,* BRANGAENE *comes forward.*

BRANGAENE

O mistress, let me speak. These things now past
Are over; but what shall be, that is ours.
Is not the honour of the Queen more worth
Than many lives? Let the Queen's honour live.
As for this knight, the kinsman of the King,
It may be he has come, not without cause,
But for your profit in all honour. Wait,
Speak gently to him, ask him why he came,
At peril of his life, back to these shores.

QUEEN

This is well thought, Brangaene.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

He has come
To bring into our midst some kind of death.
I know that if he goes out of our house
Living, we shall not all live well or long.
How can I hate him ?

QUEEN

Summon him, Brangaene.
[TRISTAN *comes nearer.*

TRISTAN

Madam, I see my pardon in your eyes.
I have one word to say, and then am silent
And wait your mercy. I have brought on you
Sorrow, yet of necessity. The sword
Of Morolt and my sword were in God's hands ;
We fought a just and equal fight, and each
Fought for his life in peril of his death.

QUEEN

Tristan, I pardon you, not willingly,
But for my honour, being here my guest
And sacred to my hearth. Here is my hand.
Iseult, your hand.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Alas, that I must take
My enemy's hand in mine !
[*She gives him her hand.*

TRISTAN [*kissing the hand of the* QUEEN]

Queen, you have given
My life to me twice over, and I have
To serve you twofold now.
[*To* ISEULT] Princess, I hold
My faith with you from this forth.

QUEEN

Why did you come,
Knowing that you are fatal to our house?

TRISTAN

May I speak out?

QUEEN

Speak quickly.

TRISTAN

If I may speak
Freely a king's speech, and being otherwise
The enemy of a king, I will disclose
The reason of my coming, which did but wait
No more than time for telling.

QUEEN

If you have
A friendly speech, then speak it as to friends.

TRISTAN

I am sent hither by King Mark of Cornwall,
My uncle, king of an unconquered realm,
Because he knew that his best enemy, Ireland,
Held the white pearl of the sea, and he desired
To wed the fairest woman in the world.

QUEEN

Is this your word or his ?

TRISTAN

It is his word.
I am his speech-bearer, and in his name
I am to ask your daughter's hand for Mark.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Who praised me to King Mark ?

TRISTAN

Not least of others,
I.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Then it was a lying tongue that spoke
A coward's praise.

QUEEN

Daughter, there is no queen
Who would need wooing more than to be told
That Mark, the King of Cornwall, sought her hand.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Mother, you do wrong to women. I have known
A woman who would have had gladlier
A shepherd's apple from a shepherd's hand
Than crowns from shaking fingers.

QUEEN

This is not
For you or me, but for the King your father.
The safety of our land may hang upon it.
We must have counsel and the voice of the King.
Sir, we will give you instant hearing. Send,
Brangaene, quickly, to my lord the King
And crave the King's good pleasure.

BRANGAENE

In haste, madam.

[*She goes to the door and sends messengers.*

QUEEN

Sir, this must not be lightly thought upon
Or idly spoken of. Weigh now your words
And tell me: is your king ready for peace?
His galleys have not often come our way
With less of spears than oars.

TRISTAN

The King desires
Peace and the marriage of two lands in one.

QUEEN

We also desire peace ; but for this marriage——

ISEULT OF IRELAND

May Iseult speak ?

QUEEN

Speak, Iseult.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

There is no king
Could give me greatness enough to fill up
The lack that he would make in me.

QUEEN

What lack ?

[BRANGAENE *comes back.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why, nothing but the lack of my own self :
I would rather be myself than be a queen.

BRANGAENE

To be a queen is to have all the world
Instead of dreaming. If you had the world,
What would you do with it ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What, you too, Brangaene ?

QUEEN

Brangaene, summon those who were in the hall.

[*She goes out.*

MERIADOC

Cousin, you should have given me the sword !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

The sword is old now, and it cannot stir,
And we must wait.

[*The guests re-enter, anxiously.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*aside*]

What have they done to him ?
He is living yet and smiles : I saw him dead.
She talks apart, patient and angry.

ANOTHER WOMAN [*aside*]

See,
The Queen looks hard at Tristan, watching him
With some new purpose.

ANOTHER WOMAN

Hush ! here is the King.

[*The* KING *comes in and goes up to the* QUEEN.

QUEEN

My lord, a boon. I ask a boon that lies
Near to my heart and to your daughter's heart.

KING OF IRELAND

Is not the thing you ask already yours
You are not so glad to ask as I to give.
What is the boon ?

QUEEN

My lord, to pardon Tristan.
He stands before you ; I am surety for him ;
He killed my brother Morolt : pardon him.

KING OF IRELAND

This is the strangest boon was ever asked.
Was Morolt not your brother ? Yet, so be it.
If you have pardoned Tristan, so have I.
Here is my hand, sir.

TRISTAN [*kneeling and kissing his hand*]

Grace, my lord the King.
Grace for my lord and master.

KING OF IRELAND

Be it so
For you, since the Queen wills it, and for him
In his own honour. Rise and sit with me.

QUEEN

My lord, this grave and most unlooked-for thing,
Which sets my brother's slayer by my side,
Not at my feet, but honoured and a guest,
Brings not less strange a fellow with it. This,
Our enemy, comes from our enemy,
King Mark of Cornwall, he that harried us,
And now, being other minded, offers peace.

KING OF IRELAND

I am well content
To hold him for ally.

QUEEN

More than ally.
He would become our kinsman, and desires
To bind us to his person, and has sent
His kinsman here to speak for him and ask
The hand of Iseult. Will you answer him?

KING OF IRELAND

The hand of Iseult?

TRISTAN

Even no less, my lord.
He is a king, but he is an old man,
And cannot go about the world and woo
A woman to his side. He sent me here
(Being so dear to him that he willed me King

After him, but I would have none of it)
To beg for him what, if he do not win,
He will not wed.

KING OF IRELAND

Is he so sure as that?

TRISTAN

So sure that he has said before his lords:
"I swear that if I may not have this woman
I will have none."

KING OF IRELAND

That is well spoken of him.

TRISTAN

He said, moreover, in my private ear:
"Say nothing of me, Tristan, but the truth:
How old I am, how grave, not easily moved,
But, being moved, unalterable; a man
Not without pity, yet most just; no youth
To flatter women in a ballad rhyme,
Like you who speak in stanza. Tell her this
And more," he said; "the truth; yet, win her, Tristan!"

KING OF IRELAND

Spoken like a lover rather than a king.
He could not ask for more, a mighty king,
And would not ask for less. What have you said,
My daughter?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Nothing. I? Nothing at all.

QUEEN

She will not answer no. Trust me, my lord,
And trouble not the girl.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Spoken like a king
Rather than like a lover. He who speaks them
Speaks the words well.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

You are to be a queen;
You will be happy, Iseult.

QUEEN

It remains
For us, my lord, to reason out this thing
And, if our kingdom claims, not to deny.
Were it not well to fetter Mark to us
With this unbreakable and silken chain?
What says my lord?

KING OF IRELAND

I say that it were well,
A happy thing for Ireland and for Cornwall,
And the beginning of some peace in the world.

TRISTAN

Long live the Queen of Cornwall!

[*All crowd up.* ISEULT OF IRELAND *turns to* BRANGAENE.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Come with me,
Brangaene. We will talk of being queens;
Not in this market, where they bid for us,
But somewhere out of doors: I am faint for air.

[*They move across the stage towards the door as the curtain falls.*

ACT II

The scene represents the deck of TRISTAN'S *ship, partly curtained off. There is a couch against the bulwark: beside it a table, on which stands a cup.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*walking to and fro restlessly*]

Day and night, day and night, how many hours?

BRANGAENE

We are two nights from Ireland, this third day
Brings us, about the second from noon,
To Cornwall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

To my prison.

BRANGAENE

To your throne.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*pausing and speaking earnestly*]

Brangaene, I am sold to be a queen,
My mother sold me, Tristan bought me, Mark

Pays down the price and takes me. I have wept
Tears that the sea could never salt, such tears
The whole sea shall not wipe out of my debt.

BRANGAENE

O mistress, you have not the eyes for tears.
Comfort yourself: you shall take joy to Cornwall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

There is none here.

BRANGAENE

It is written in my heart.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Is it because you love me that you say
Comfortable things to me?

BRANGAENE

The love I have
Runs forward. I am your watchdog, and I hear
A footstep in the dark.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What do you hear?
What can you hear but the old feeble feet
Of a grey king?

BRANGAENE

Is it a little thing,
Kings will kneel down to you ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What do I want with knees
That kneel because their joints are growing old ?
I am to be an honourable wife
To the old king who harried us till age
Quieted him into fear. He would have peace,
And I am the peace-offering.

BRANGAENE

It may be
That you will bring some peace upon yourself.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Death would bring peace : if this bright sea would lift
And take me down where Tristan could not dive
Nor Mark cast nets upon me ! no, nor Iseult,
My cousin of Brittany, with her patient eyes
Weep as she did for Tristan, not for me :
All are against me.

BRANGAENE

Do not think these things.
It may be joy will come to you, if not peace.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

No, for I think too much, and there's too little
That I can do. Why is it I can do nothing ?

The man I would have killed holds both my hands.

[MERIADOC *comes forward, kneels, and kisses the hem of* ISEULT'S *robe, looking up at her intently.*]

Cousin, you have some message in your eyes.
Tell it.

MERIADOC

Iseult, I kneel to you. Iseult,
It might be now, if you will give the word.
He is unarmed, he leans beside the helm,
My men are all about him ; one of them
Will strike the helmsman, set the helm about.
Tristan is mine : this dagger is for him.
One word, Iseult, and you are free, O queen !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan is mine : why do you call him yours ?
Do I not hate him worse than you can do,
Because I am a woman ? If, some day,
He break the faith that we have sworn to him,
He is yours ; do with him what you will. But now
There is a bond between us, and he must live
So long as he keeps faith with his own word.

[MERIADOC *rises sullenly.*

MERIADOC

The blood of Morolt sinks into my soul :
I have not sworn, take off your hand from me.
It is for you I wait and do not strike.
Say now that I may free my soul and yours !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Meriadoc, stand here. No, closer: here.
Give me your dagger. [*He gives her the dagger eagerly.*]
Do you still obey
My will because it is my will?

MERIADOC [*excitedly*]

Yes, yes!
Iseult, the word now!

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*holding out the dagger*]

Swear, then, on this cross
To keep your faith with Tristan while he keeps
His faith with me!

MERIADOC

I am your slave; yet ask
Some other thing than this.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Swear on this cross!

MERIADOC

Iseult, my life is yours.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Swear!

MERIADOC

Take my life
And give me this man's !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Swear upon the cross !

MERIADOC

I swear.

[*He holds out his hand over the hilt of the dagger, then takes the dagger and puts it back in its sheath.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Call Tristan. I would speak with him.
[MERIADOC *bends low and goes out.*

BRANGAENE

Is it well ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

It is well. I am tired of silence.
Have no fear. I will talk with him alone.
And you, for you are tired, give your eyes rest
And go and sleep a little. I will call
If I should need you.

BRANGAENE

I am indeed sick
For lack of sleep ; but should I leave you ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Go.
Sleep, rest, and come again.

[BRANGAENE *goes out.*
[ISEULT *sits in meditation.*
[*There is a pause, and* TRISTAN *enters.*

TRISTAN

You sent for me.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You would not come unless I sent for you.

TRISTAN

I feared to come uncalled.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

How is this, sir ?
You did not fear, I think, to come uncalled
To Ireland.

TRISTAN

I was sent.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You did not come
For any will of yours—that I know well ;
And yet you came. It is not what we would,
But what we must do, that we do.

TRISTAN

True, madam.
For me, I have always done what the sea would:
Once the sea took me to you, and now again
It casts me back to you the second time.
I do not know why I am on this ship.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You are my gaoler.

TRISTAN

You are bitter, madam.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You have been bitter to me from the first.
Before I knew you I had never known
Sorrow; it was your courage and your craft
That brought sorrow upon me. What ill star
Led you from Cornwall into Ireland?

TRISTAN

What
May not the blind stars do with us who are blind?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Once had your sword not eyes? But none of that.
I will but ask you why you drag me out
From my own land into this foreign land
To be a stranger among strangers. Where
You carry me I know not, nor what price
Was paid for me, nor what shall be the end.

TRISTAN

Say what you will, I have not done you wrong
To bring you to a kingdom. You shall find
Peace in it and a crown ; you shall have riches
And pleasure and content and idleness,
And you shall be the wife of a great king.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Sir, I would rather have a lower lot
In my own land, and love with it, than here
A loveless trouble with great riches.

TRISTAN

No,
Not loveless and not troubled, but the pride
And wage of beauty : all men's eyes and one
Man's love upon you.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Have you such a wage ?
Is it for love that you would have me wed
An old king in an island of my foes ?

TRISTAN

For love of love, for love of power, for pride.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Who shall I have to look into my eyes
That I may be his life and death to him ?

TRISTAN

I may not answer you. You gave me life.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You have been evil to me, and not good,
And yet I gave you life. Is this well done?

TRISTAN

You gave me life. I thanked you for the gift.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I would have given you death. The second time
Why was it that I did not give you death?
Why did I give you life?

TRISTAN [*half drawing his sword and holding the hilt towards her*]

I give you back
The gift you gave, if you will have it back.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan, stand fast, and keep me to my word.
I keep you to your word to me. Stand fast,
For there is blood between us.
[*She starts to her feet.*

TRISTAN

For that blood
Have I not made atonement? Let there be
Peace between you and me.

ISEULT OF IRELAND
What peace? What peace?

TRISTAN
If there is no peace left us possible,
There is no less one thing between us two—
Honour: let everything but honour die.
The past is dead already; for the future
We'll also say Amen; for what now is,
The present of this instant, I have sworn
To bring you of all women for a wife
Home to my lord the King. I serve my King
In all things honourable; I will serve
My Queen in all things as I serve my King.

ISEULT OF IRELAND
Where is it written that I shall be served
By this wise enemy, who stole my peace
As a thief takes a jewel? If there be
Atonement for the blood that you have shed,
How can there be atonement for my peace?

TRISTAN
All things may be forgotten.

ISEULT OF IRELAND
All things past
Were well forgotten, when to think of them
Burns like a fire. Then, lest I should forget
That all things are forgotten, let us seal

This covenant. I will bid Brangaene—no,
Brangaene is asleep. Where is the child
Who loves to wait upon me? Child!

[*A* CHILD *puts aside a curtain and runs up.*

Bring me some wine,
A flagon, and a cup, and fill the cup.

[*The* CHILD *runs back and returns with a flagon and a cup, which she fills.*

[ISEULT *takes it from her, and she goes quietly back through the curtain with the empty flagon.*

This wine shall wash out Morolt's blood. I drink
Forgetfulness, I put away my hate,
I will love no man, I will be friends with you,
Tristan, for Mark's sake, I will be a queen,
I will wed Mark. Pledge me! my husband, Mark!

[*She drinks and hands him the cup.*

TRISTAN

Health to Iseult, honour and peace to Mark!

[*He drinks.*

[*There is a long pause, and they slowly recoil from each other, looking with amazement in each other's eyes.*

[*The cup drops from his hands.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan!

TRISTAN

Iseult! O, is it life or death,
Iseult? Am I awakening into death?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I too, I think I am awakening.
Wait for me, Tristan, I have been asleep.

TRISTAN

Iseult !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I will not go to sleep again,
But you did well to waken me. I thank you.

TRISTAN

But yesterday death was not ; nay, no more
Than even such an instant point of time,
And there is something born into the world :
Is it death, is it love ? I cannot tell ;
Only it is an ending and a birth.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You have been crying to me in my dreams ;
I heard your voice, I thought it was the sea,
And that awoke me, and I find you here.

TRISTAN

I think I have been always at your side.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

No, no, not always : I remember now,
There was another time before this time.
This is the sea, Ireland is far away ;
But you are with me and I am awake at last.

TRISTAN

I do not think that I am yet awake.
What is it that has bound me with these chains
That burn like shining fire about my soul?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What is it that has set me free? I feel
As if a boundless joy had given me wings:
I am as universal as the sun.
Look, Tristan, there is nothing here but light:
Light in the sky, light in the hollow sea,
The encircling and caressing light of the air!
Light eats into my flesh and drinks me up:
I am a cup for the immense thirst of light;
I cannot see you, Tristan, for the light.

TRISTAN

Iseult, I see you wrapped about with light
As in a glory, clothed and garlanded,
And your face shines, it dazzles me; your eyes
Are burning out of brightness like two flames.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan, I love you.

TRISTAN

Iseult!

[*They rush into each other's arms*]

I have loved
Your hatred, now I love you for your love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*looking up at him, in the embrace*]

Have we been foes? I think we have been foes.
Look deeper, Tristan, deeper in my heart.

TRISTAN

I look into your eyes, you have grey eyes,
They are as deep and changing as the sea,
There is not any shadow in your eyes.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*withdrawing from the embrace*]

There is a weary, salt, and bitter thing
That eats my heart. I know not what it is.
[*She moves a few steps away.*

TRISTAN

Yet love is stronger than the sea or death.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*crouching down on the seat by the bulwarks*]

O what is love, and why is love so bitter
After the blinding sweetness of a moment?
I am afraid, I am afraid of love.
This is some death that has got hold on me;
The night is coming back into my soul.
Tristan, I am afraid. If this is love,
I am afraid of the intolerable love.
[*She covers her face with her hands.*
[*There is a long pause.*
[*Tristan looks at her in silence, then goes up to her slowly and touches her on the shoulder.*

TRISTAN

Fear not, Iseult ; this thing must be endured ;
We have not sought it, it must be endured.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*looking up slowly*]

O is this love, and must we endure love ?
I did not know that love was so like death.
O sorrowful, unkind, unhappy love !

TRISTAN

I think that from this moment we have done
With being happy or unhappy ; all
We have to do is only to rejoice
Because we are together and alive.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

You do not fear ? You do not wonder now ?
Love me no better than I love you, Tristan !
Tristan, I still wonder and am afraid.

TRISTAN

Love casts out fear, not wonder. Is it not
A thing past wonder that, of all the dust
Time shakes out of his hour-glass, he has made
This little hour for us to meet in ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Yes,
I will believe it, but not wonder at it.
Tristan, I am content. I will not fear.
There shall be now for us nothing of all
That has been all things to us ; we are gone
A great way out into an unknown sea ;
There is no land behind us. Look, Tristan,
The sea is naked as the hand of a man,
The sea gathers us up into its hand.
Take me in your arms and kiss me on the mouth.
[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*

BRANGAENE [*rushing in*]

O woe ! O woe ! O most unhappy woman !
What have I done ? I would that I had died !
Why did you let me sleep away your life ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What does this mean, Brangaene ?

BRANGAENE

The cup ! The cup !
[*She snatches up the flagon from the table.*

TRISTAN

What of the cup ?

BRANGAENE

O mistress, there is death,
And worse than death, hid in the cup.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why, what is worse than death?

BRANGAENE

Love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*eagerly*]

And the cup,
It was the cup of love?

BRANGAENE

It was the cup
Of love. Your mother bade me give it you
Upon your marriage-night. It would have bound
Your heart and the King's heart into one heart.
But now, but now, mistress, what have you done?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I have done that which shall not be undone.
Give me the cup.

[BRANGAENE *gives it to her reluctantly.*

[*She takes it in both hands and holds it against her breast, reverently.*

O sacred cup of love
And death, I hold you.

[*Then she casts it far out into the sea.*

And I cast you out,
That no man save this man may drink of you,
Nor any other woman.

TRISTAN

I have drunk
A poison that no man has ever tasted,
For it has withered honour in my heart
And filled my soul up with forgetfulness.
There was a king for whom I would have died.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

All this shall be forgotten. What must be
Must be, and it is we who have been bound
Together, and this king I am to marry
Is as a stranger I shall never know.
Blessed be the cup of love, and, O Brangaene,
I bless those little hands that gave it me,
Innocent hands, not knowing what they gave.
You also shall be blessed, because you slept
And all your wisdom could not hold me back
From what I had to do.

TRISTAN

What does she say
Of death?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Good tidings, Tristan.

BRANGAENE

Evil tidings.
There were both love and death hid in the cup;
This cup shall be one death to both of you.

TRISTAN

I could not love you, Iseult, and not die.

[MERIADOC *comes in, looking scrutinizingly at the three, and comes forward anxiously.*

MERIADOC

My lady has no further need of me.
Now it is Tristan who must keep his faith,
And I with Tristan, for her eyes are changed.
They tell me, Tristan, that from this day forth
I have to serve you.

TRISTAN [*holding out his hand*]

As a friend a friend.

[MERIADOC *clasps hands with* TRISTAN, *who moves aside and leans against the bulwark of the ship.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Call me the little maid.

[MERIADOC *goes out and, after a moment, the* CHILD *enters.*

Come, little one.
Child, give me both your hands ; closer to me.
I want to look at you and hold your hands.
I think I love you. Do you love me, child ?

CHILD

Yes, lady, dearly.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

When you brought me wine
You gave me something that you did not know,
And I too did not know. I took the cup
Out of these little hands, and now I kiss
Your hands because you gave me a great gift.
[*She kisses her two hands, one after the other.*

CHILD

O lady, I would give you all the world.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why so you have; you have given me all the world.

CHILD

I gave you nothing. When you are a queen——

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What shall I give you when I am a queen?

CHILD

I want to see you with a golden crown.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

And is that all?

CHILD

I want you to be just
As happy always as you are to-day.
Is it because of the crown? You used to be
Prouder, but not so happy.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I do not know.
Perhaps it is not good to be a queen.
I am going to a land I do not know.

CHILD [*looking away*]

Look, look, there is the land! O, is it Cornwall?

[*The* CHILD *runs away and looks over the side of the ship.*

[TRISTAN *comes back towards* ISEULT *and* BRANGAENE.

[SAILORS *come forward over the deck, making preparations for landing.*

CRIES [*within*]

Ho! Cornwall!

BRANGAENE

Mistress!

TRISTAN

Iseult!

CRIES [*within*]

Cornwall! Cornwall!

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Is this my kingdom? Why, an angry shore.
Tristan, your hand, to lead me to the King!

[*Smiling, she holds out her hand to him as the curtain falls.*

ACT III

The scene represents a garden in the palace of KING MARK *at Tintagel, overlooking the sea. The sea is seen below, through the trees at the edge of the rocky cliff. It is nearly dawn on a day in summer.*

[KING MARK *comes out hurriedly from under the trees on the right, dragging after him* MELOT *the jester, who throws himself at his feet.*

KING MARK

You saw the Queen?

MELOT

My lord, I saw the Queen.
Master! forgive me!

KING MARK

Once you saw the Queen
Under the willow-trees beside the spring;
You put a poison into both my ears:
Where was truth then?

MELOT

Master, this tale is true.
It is my sorrow that I tell you truth,
Because I love you. Let the fool speak truth!

KING MARK
I wrong no woman and no man again
For any idle speech. You have been warned.
Now, still you saw the Queen?

MELOT
I saw the Queen,
Past midnight——

KING MARK
How? You do not sleep by night?
You spy for me by night?

MELOT
I had slept; I dreamed.

KING MARK
Well, and your dream?

MELOT
The horn of the white moon
Pointed.

KING MARK
Well, well?

MELOT
I heard an owlet hoot
Three times! three callings.

KING MARK
But the dream?

MELOT

I rose,
Because the moon called and the owlet called;
I looked out of my window: all the ground
Was moist because of the long evening rain.
I saw his footprints.

KING MARK

Wherefore his?

MELOT

They led
From under Tristan's window. This is truth,
Master, the truth of God!

KING MARK

You followed them?

MELOT

I followed, and where he had set his feet
I set my feet, footprint for footprint. So,
Stepping without a trace, delicately,
I came to the Queen's window.

KING MARK

He was there?

MELOT

He stood and reached his hands to her, who stood
Higher than she could reach him, though she leaned
Her right arm from the casement, murmuring.

KING MARK

What did she say?

[KING MARK *clutches his arm*]

Come, you must say the words,
But quietly.

MELOT

Master, you hurt me.

KING MARK

Come,
The words she said.

MELOT

I could not hear the words.
But Tristan stood and lifted up his hands,
Entreating something, and she laughed.

KING MARK

She laughed.
Then she was only merry; a wild jest,
No more than that. And she was flushed?

MELOT

No, pale,
And Tristan, paler, and both as if some hunger
Starved both their faces thin.

KING MARK

That's not so good.
And then?

MELOT

Then Tristan turned, and I drew back.
I looked again, he seemed to say farewell,
And I went softly backward in his steps,
Crept in at my own window, watched, and saw
Tristan returning.

KING MARK

If this thing be true,
Which cannot be, or there's an end of truth,
Yet may be true, and then, why, Tristan's dead.
Not a word more, Melot; he was my sword:
Swords may dig graves; but yet it is not true.
Her eyes are naked to me, clean as light,
It is impossible to doubt her eyes.
[*He walks away and comes back as he speaks*]
No, no, I'll not believe it: if it be,
These two have done dishonour on their souls
Deep as my hurt, deeper than any hurt.
Melot, my friend, my fool, what have I done
That I should house this grief? If this be so,
My fool must pity me.
[MELOT *embraces his feet*]
I wrong myself
Even to doubt. I should not hear your words.

MELOT

Have you not seen their faces as they burned
Like flame on flame ?

KING MARK

I have seen their faces burn
Like flame on flame. Why should a natural fire
Not burn ? And why should we put out the day ?

MELOT

Master, master, I have not told you all.

KING MARK

The truth, Melot, and, before God, the truth !

MELOT

What if I tell you of the very hour—
It is an hour from now—here, in this garden.
Do you not hunt to-night ?

KING MARK

Before the dawn.

MELOT

Is Tristan with you ?

KING MARK

Tristan would not come.

MELOT

Before the dawn they will be here together.
Will you be led by Melot? Go your way,
Feign to lead off the hunt; but come again,
Suddenly, in an hour, where Melot is,
And you shall take them in each other's arms.

KING MARK

What if I thrust this sword into your heart
You would have me lift on Tristan?

MELOT

Sire, to-morrow
Thrust your sword deeper down into my heart
Than any lie you find there.

KING MARK

Who of us,
I wonder, Melot, is to die to-night?
I have trusted only one man in the world
And loved only one woman. If these two
Are now in league against me, I am cast out
Of an unnatural and foolish heaven
They lured me into. Were it not but just
If with one sword I slew these two? And then——

MELOT [*crouching beside him*]

My lord, my lord, you will not lift your hand
Against your own life! Swear it on the cross!

[*He snatches up a gold cross which* KING MARK *wears on his chain and holds it up to him.*

KING MARK

No, no, there are no oaths for me. I speak
I know not what. Death is a woman and plays
A secret game with us. What shall it be
If this be true, if this impossible,
Unthinkable, all too likely thing be true?

[He goes slowly out, followed by MELOT. *There is a pause, and* TRISTAN *and* ISEULT OF IRELAND *come slowly out from under the trees on the left. They move partly across the garden, then stop, and stand face to face.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

If death should come upon us in this hour,
What would you say? Would you thank God for life?

TRISTAN

I would thank God for life,
For I have lived, this hour, two lives in one.
Have I not held your body with my hands?
Have I not drunk your soul up with my lips?
Have I not hated you with all my love?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Is it the dawn? Look up. Do not the stars
Doubt and not know if it is day or night?
Night has not been, and this is not the dawn.

TRISTAN

It is the dawn. Why is it I must go?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I cannot let you go. Listen: the leaves
Are still, and the sea scarcely shivers. Come,
I will not let you go.

TRISTAN

Shall I stay here
Until you bid me go?

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*gathering handfuls of roses*]

No, no, for that
Would never be. See where the roses burn!
These roses are the prodigals of June,
They burn, they waste to ashes, they are a fire
Too spendthrift of the summer. Take them, Tristan.
Do you not feel the blood of the roses burn
Between my fingers into both your hands?

TRISTAN

I have let them fall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Let them lie there and die
Before they know the long rains of the year
And weeping autumn. So should all flowers die,
And we. Will you not linger if I talk
Of roses and heap up into your hands
So many that you cannot see my face?
[*They sit down on a stone seat under the trees, beside the rose-bushes.*
And yet: must you not go?

TRISTAN

The light begins
To search into your eyes. Is it your face?
I shall not find it when I look again.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*flinging her arms around him*]

I cannot let you go; I put my hands
About your neck; I hold you with my hands.
You will not leave me while I hold you fast?

TRISTAN

How should I leave my love, my sustenance,
And go into an exile willingly?
And yet you catch at me as if you feared
That I would let you go.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I hold you fast
Because I fear: hold me and comfort me.
Swear over the old oaths, they are all here,
Here is my heart; but swear them over, Tristan,
Before you go; and kiss me in the neck.

TRISTAN

I have no words that can be said twice over.
[*He kisses her.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan, it is my life
Your lips drink up : I cannot bear your lips :
I feel them to the marrow of my bones.
O I would be a fire and burn your lips,
O I would be a beast and eat your lips,
I would annihilate their sweetness. Now
My blood is all an anguish of desire.
Speak, slay me, do not kiss me. Kiss me now !

TRISTAN [*drawing back from her and looking into her eyes*]

Iseult, there is an end,
Men say, to love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

O foolish men !

TRISTAN

For us
Shall our love have an end ? Shall time pluck out
Our eyes, put out our blood ? Shall we two see
Each other and not tremble ? I hold your hands
In both my hands : one day shall we take hands
And not a vein in either of them leap up
To bid the other welcome ?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

What shall time
Steal from the blood ? What is there he can steal
Out of the marrow that is in the bones ?

TRISTAN

Nothing! the blood and marrow, these remain,
But there is something over in the soul
That will not be cast out. I have drunk up
All but forgetfulness.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

I have drunk up
Forgetfulness. It was a bitter draught;
Lees of the drink: Mark and a marriage-bed!
But the first draught, the sweetness of it, Tristan!

TRISTAN

I have forgotten that I had a friend.
He would have thrust a crown upon me, but
I had no uses for it. No man loved
Another as he loved me, and now, now
My neck is set into a felon's noose:
I am dragged up and down here in the dust.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Love is a sword, and the sword severs friends!
Love is a fire and burns all lesser things.
Love is not love
Unless it root up honour like a weed.

TRISTAN

Love is not love unless it honour honour
Above all mortal things.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

There is a thing
Which is the faith of love : I know none else,
No other God, or king, or counsellor,
No crown, no joy, no glory, and it devours
All pleasures and all bonds and is a flame
No wind shall put out.

TRISTAN

Only now a wind
Has put my honour out, as a wind blows
A candle out, and all the room is dark.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why will you cry that barren bastard word
Honour ? I tell you, Tristan, I would now
Walk up the minster aisle at Caerleon,
Barefoot before the bishops and their God,
And hold the red-hot iron in my hand.
Fire would not burn me : God would do me right :
I have not sinned against the honour of love.

TRISTAN

What have I done that any woman born
Should love me so beyond her soul ? God knows
That I must love you, Iseult, beyond death.
[*He kneels down and kisses her hand.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Death shall end all things : we are quiet then :
I shall not want your love when I am dead :
Take back your honour and let it warm your grave ;
But, till the grasses creep and cover me,
Tristan, this is my body and my blood,
And they are yours.

TRISTAN

The world passes away,
You have put the world into a dusty pit,
And all is covered up. Do with my life
What you would do with it.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Shall I know your soul ?
Tristan, what if the King should find us here ?

TRISTAN

I would not raise my hand against my King :
If he would slay me, he has but to strike.

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*starting to her feet*]

Coward to me !
Let Mark's right hand fumble about your heart
With the hunting-knife that never killed a deer !
Have I no place there ? Would you have him find me
There, where he looks to find me ?

TRISTAN

He is my King.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Will you be false to me, and for a king?

TRISTAN

Why do you look upon me with such eyes?

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan, take hold of me, and hold me fast,
And hurt my fingers between both your hands,
And kiss me on the lips, and say I have lied!

TRISTAN

I kiss your head that God made for a crown,
But I will swear no oaths now any more:
We have said all that need be said till death.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Now, go; go quickly; for the dawn is here.
How soon it comes! I did not see it come,
And how the day has all its eyes on us.
Hark, what was that? No, do not stir.
[*She seizes him.*

TRISTAN

I hear
Brangaene calling.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

She is running, see,
Under the trees.

[BRANGAENE *comes towards them, running.*

BRANGAENE

Mistress !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Why do we know
The thing before it comes and not believe it ?
Is it the King, Brangaene ?

BRANGAENE

It is the King !

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Were we not talking, Tristan, of to-morrow ?
There shall be no to-morrow. This is well.

BRANGAENE [*panting*]

The King came to the gate, he stayed at the gate ;
Melot rose up out of a spying corner
And whispered in his ear ; Melot had seen
Lord Tristan when he entered ; the King turned ;
Melot and he went stealthily away ;
Melot turned back and watched at the gate ;
But now is the King gone to summon these
That shall be eyes to him and see his shame.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Tristan, there is no need now any more
To make a hooded secret of our love;
Soon the whole world shall look into our hearts
Because Mark wills it. The King's will be done.

TRISTAN

I have undone the glory of your crown:
Men shall speak evil of you for my sake:
I would that Mark had stabbed me in my sleep!

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Now I am glad, utterly glad at last,
This first time wholly since the day of days
We drank down love together. I have my will,
I have always willed that he should take us thus.
[*She takes* TRISTAN'S *hand.*
Is he not long in coming? Go, Brangaene,
Open the door for the King's coming; bring
My lord the King and greet him from his wife.

[KING MARK *enters, closely followed by* MELOT; *behind them the lords of the court, in hunting dress.* KING MARK *pauses and then comes slowly forward.*

KING MARK [*to* ISEULT]

Queen, I have come to take you to your throne.
My kingdom cannot spare you; you are wise,
Wiser than women; I have need of you.

There has been also some particular love
By which, in the past, I have been bound to you :
That will I lay aside, needing it not.
These lords bear witness you are my true Queen ;
You have been dear to me, being my wife,
And I have something that I will not say ;
Only, I do you honour as my Queen.

[KING MARK *turns slowly to* TRISTAN]

But you, blood of my blood, sword of my sword,
I have no words to be avenged on you.
I shall wipe Cornwall clean of such a shame.
This, my good lords, is Tristan, my sister's son,
My son, if he had willed to be my son ;
I would have given him up my kingdom : he,
For honour's sake and for your sake, my lords,
Would none of it : he would not take my crown.
O baser, infinite ingratitude,
He would not take my kingdom ; no, he would
That I should wed him from inheritance.
He brought me this—this Queen to be my wife,
That he might take a woman from my bed.
O Tristan, there are many souls in hell
That have not dragged so base a sin as this
Out of the sight and judgment-place of God.

TRISTAN [*who has drawn back, with bowed head*]

King ! Master !

KING MARK

He is speechless.

ISEULT OF IRELAND
Let me speak!
Only, my lord, bid these begone from us:
We have no need of any witness now.
[KING MARK *motions to the* LORDS, *who go out.*

MELOT [*as he goes*]
I have cracked the nut; they will scramble for the pieces.
[*He goes out.*

KING MARK
Iseult, is there, then, anything to say?

ISEULT OF IRELAND
My lord, you see that Tristan cannot speak,
You see that Tristan is too honourable
To speak the truth. I am a woman, sir,
And women have no honour mixed in the blood
That sways to a man for loving. You and I
Were set into one bed because two lands
Had torn too long at one another's throats:
I brought you Ireland, and you gave me Cornwall.
What did you give me in a little earth
That weighs no more than mine? I am alive
Wherever there is the earth under me.
There is a thing not meshed into your crown,
There is a thing, my lord, most necessary
To every soul that comes into the world:
I have not stolen it, Tristan gave it me.
He did not rob you: he had it of himself,
You cannot punish us because we loved.

KING MARK

I loved you ; you have wronged me in my love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

This love is innocent as life or death.
The open unastonished eyes of day
Look on it and are not ashamed. There is
No other thing necessary in the world.
But you have killed it, and for your own sake
Dragged your own honour in the dust. Now, now,
What will you do for love's sake ?

KING MARK [*turning from her*]

Tristan first.
Stand up before me, Tristan. Answer me :
Will your tongue speak this woman's evil words ?
No, you are silent ; there is still a little,
A little honour left. You turn from her :
Your forehead is a penitent for shame.

TRISTAN

I turn to you, my King, but not from her ;
For I have wronged you. If I have brought wrong
Upon the Queen of Cornwall, not my life
Shall ransom my misdeed ; for what besides
Now lies between us, there is nothing left
For me to do, nothing to undo ; all
Is over, and the end of things has come.
If there is any honour left in me,
It may be honour shall yet make me whole.

KING MARK

Tristan, give me your sword.

[TRISTAN *gives him his sword, which he breaks across his knee and throws on the ground.*

Your sword I break,
Only I leave you, not for pity, life.
It may be you will yet redeem your honour;
But here, no more; you are as one now dead,
Cast out of the clean honest midst of us.
I banish you from Cornwall.

[ISEULT OF IRELAND *springs forward and draws out a naked dagger, which she offers to* TRISTAN.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

No, not that!
Kill Mark!

TRISTAN [*putting by her hand gently*]

I have been conquered, and all's vain, Iseult.
If you have loved me, be a little sorry
And you, my King, forgive me.

[*He goes out slowly and with bent head.*

KING MARK

Iseult, come!

[*He holds out his hand to her as the curtain falls.*

ACT IV

The scene represents a room in the castle in Brittany: at the back is a window overlooking the sea. On the left TRISTAN *lies in bed, asleep. By the side of the bed is a table, on which stands a flagon of wine and a cup. There is a door on the right.*

[ISEULT OF BRITTANY *is watching beside* TRISTAN.
[ELAINE *stands at the foot of the bed.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Look out and see if you can see the ship.

ELAINE

Madam, there is not a sail upon the sea.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Is the wind rising?

ELAINE

The wind is striking
The waves like a great hammer on the walls.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*bending over* TRISTAN *and then moving away*]

He is asleep. Call the physician in.
[ELAINE *goes to the door and beckons.*
[*The physician comes in.*
Can my lord live? Speak low. He is asleep.

PHYSICIAN

Madam, must I speak comfortable words
Or speak the truth ?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

The truth.

PHYSICIAN

All things are possible
To our divine and undivulged art :
It may be he will live.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

It may be ? Speak
More comfortable words, and yet speak truth.

PHYSICIAN

All things being possible in medicine,
And all things known that may destroy or heal
Being known to this great doctor of Salerno
We look for in the ship that Tristan sent,
It may be that this lord of secret things
Has found some magic herb of Italy
We know not of, north of the western waters.
If he have found some curable accident
Of nature, and how poison can lick up
Poison, my lord may still be saved ! and yet,
If he should live——

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

If he should live ?

PHYSICIAN

The wonder
Will outpace nature, for so fierce a wound,
So deadly venomed, I have never seen.
The knife that pierced him was a savage knife,
Dipped in some foul, unnatural broth of death,
Poisoning the sources, and his blood is turned
Quite out of the honest current of the blood.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

It was the poisoned knife of Meriadoc.
The knife was not so mortal as it was
When Tristan struck him back.

PHYSICIAN

He struck the heart!
The traitor's hand was not so sure! the wound
Had healed by now but for the poison in it.
Whence had this man so fierce a drug? The like
Is only brewed by witches over sea.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

A witch, yes, a most deadly Irish witch.

PHYSICIAN

This poison has been bought at a great price.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

A great price paid in hell and hoarded up
To be my wedding gift. Must Tristan die?

PHYSICIAN

'Tis a strange thing he has lived so many days,
Outlived the limit. Something holds him still,
I know not what, to life. Does my lord desire
The questionable gift of life so much?
Men dying have lived on by willing it.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I did not know that he loved life so much.
He has been moody, he has only cared
For fighting in the field! I have never seen
A joyous ardour in him since he came
Back to our coasts, not even when he drove
The enemies from our gates and gave my father
His dukedom back.

PHYSICIAN

Did he not take the hand
Of the duke's noble daughter for a gift
And guerdon? He has reason to love life.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Seek for it elsewhere.

PHYSICIAN

It may be in the ship.
Does he not question eagerly of the ship
We wait for from Salerno?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Eagerly.

PHYSICIAN

Hope bids him live. He lives until he sees
The ship, and then—God send his grace therewith.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I thank you. You have put into my heart
A little seed of hope, and it will grow.
Go quietly. He still sleeps. He must not wake.
[*The* PHYSICIAN *goes out.*

ELAINE

O lady, is there any hope?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

All hope,
This learned man has told me, all hope now
Is in the ship. My lord will surely live
Until the ship is here.

ELAINE

And then?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Why, then,
He is saved.

ELAINE

Who is this lady that is coming
To save him?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Lady?

ELAINE

Might this lady be
Some kinswoman or cousin of my lady.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Why who then?

ELAINE

She who is coming in the ship.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

There is no woman coming in the ship.
The ship is coming from Salerno with
The greatest leech in Italy.

ELAINE

But no,
How can that be?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Why not?

ELAINE

Because the ship
Set sail for Cornwall.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*starting*]
Cornwall?

ELAINE
Was it not?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*checking herself*]
Ah yes, to Cornwall. How did you know, my child?

ELAINE
I listened——

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
Yes.

ELAINE
I heard, although my lord
Spoke low. He bade take ship——

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
To Cornwall?

ELAINE
Yes,
With speed, and bring back speedily——

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
Yes, bring——

ELAINE

The name was yours, madam, the Lady Iseult!

TRISTAN [*in his sleep, loudly*]

Iseult!

ELAINE

My lord is calling to you.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Not to me.
He is talking in his sleep.
[*Moving towards the bed*] Was it to me,
Tristan, or the one woman in the world?
[*To* ELAINE] I will watch beside him. Let me be alone.
[ELAINE *goes out, and* ISEULT OF BRITTANY *walks to and fro in agitation.*
Iseult is coming in the ship: he lives
Until the ship is here. She will come in
And take my husband, who was never hers,
Out of my arms. I have not stolen her name;
It is my own poor name. I have not stolen
Her love from this proud queen: it still is hers,
He is all hers, but he is also mine.
Why should she come, being so rich, to me
Who am so poor? Must beggars give back alms?
This man is mine, I hold him: better dead
And mine, than hers and living. What have I said?
It is this deadly woman whom I hate
That comes to bring him death. He shall not die.

Shall she suck out her poison in his wound?
She would not save him. Could I give him back
Into her hands if she would heal him? O
The bitterness of love, the hate of love,
So kind in the beginning and so sharp
A sickle when the seed has come to ear!
What am I but a woman, who loves only
The man whom she has held between her arms?
Shall I begin to hate him for her sake,
Because he loved no other than this fair,
This deadly royal woman of my name,
The other Iseult? Me he never loved.
Would that the sea drank her, and that her ship
Were gulped down living by a wide-mouthed wave!
She shall not take him from me while he lives.

TRISTAN [*in sleep*]
Iseult!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
He is calling on her in his sleep.

TRISTAN [*half awakening*]
Say nothing more. If I am sick to death,
There is one ending; but no tears, Iseult.
Open the window.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*going to the window and opening it*]
So?

TRISTAN
Open it wide.
Do you not see a sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

There is no sail.
The wind is cold, and there is a grey rain.
Shall I not close the window?

TRISTAN [*rising in his bed*]

Listen! A cry.
It is the sea. Tell me, is it the sea?
There is another crying, but it is here,
Here in my wrists and forehead; but this voice
Is louder than the little voice of the blood.
Iseult, listen, and tell me if you hear.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I hear the wind rushing and the waves beat.

TRISTAN

Oh no, oh no,
It is the crying of an incurable wound,
It turns on a sick-bed and cannot sleep,
It cries to me, and I am sick, I am sick.
[*He falls back on his bed.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*coming up to the bed*]

You must lie quieter than a sea-swallow
Upon a rocking wave. You know our birds
Find homes in the loud middle of the storm
When we are frightened. Cannot you, my lord,
Look for some peace and solace in this pain?

TRISTAN

No, no, I can but cry as the sea cries.
I am as angry with my pain, as weak
And angry as the sea that hates the wind.
But you are gentle as a feathered thing
That the wind carries ; and you do not fear the sea ?
You do not fear me, Iseult ?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

My dear lord,
There is some cruel stranger in your heart
I indeed fear ; but you are always gentle,
And when you look at me and speak my name
You say my name as if indeed you loved me.

TRISTAN

I made a song once, all men sing it now,
The song of Iseult, Tristan's life and death,
And women weep to hear it, and men too.
I made it with the sorrow of the world
And with the sorrow in the hearts of men.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Your eyes are full of tears to think of it.
Is it your pain ? I would not, though the name
Be mine, that it should hurt you.

TRISTAN

Love made the name.
It is a heart-shaped talisman and holds
The very heart of love. I say it over
Like something I remember in my sleep.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I heard you say it in your sleep to-day.

TRISTAN

Look, that was a white wing ; it dipped in the wind :
A white bird : a good messenger. Look out,
Iseult, and tell me if you see a sail.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*going to the window*]

I see the grey sea and the grey sky. Nothing.

TRISTAN

I am sick, Iseult ; but if this ship would come,
It would bring life. He knows the medicine
That heals me even of death : he brings me life.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Has this physician from Salerno, then,
So infinite a skill ?

TRISTAN

Infinite skill !

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Is he a man of books or does he find
Secret in herbs and healing in the earth ?

TRISTAN

All things are possible to love : he loves.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

He comes himself, if you but send for him?

TRISTAN

I do not know if he will come himself;
But if he come, I know that I shall live.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Tristan, if I had skill to bring you life,
As I have will to do it and love too,
You should not need this coming; but alas,
I have but will and love and nothing else.
I cannot heal you; but if the Mother of God
Be yet in heaven the mother of us men,
You shall be healed.

TRISTAN

Have you been praying, Iseult?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I have not ceased to pray.

TRISTAN

Shall God forgive?
I think that God did never yet forgive.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Lie quiet in your bed and do not think
About these things that we shall never know.
There have been prayers that saved from death.

TRISTAN

Not so.
I shall lay by my glory with my soul,
And when my body, that feasted and lay warm,
Is sewn into a clout, then shall my hall
Be made with a spade, and my bower builded soon:
Worms shall come in to be my guests in the dark.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Why do you murmur over these old words
That the priests say in Latin?

TRISTAN

There shall be,
In the grave, no forgetting.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

You shall live!

TRISTAN [*starting up*]

Why do you wake me? There is a sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

No sail!

TRISTAN [*wildly*]

Do you not see I am dying hour by hour,
And yet you will not come!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Hush, you speak wildly.

TRISTAN

Iseult!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

See, I am here.

TRISTAN

No, no, O God!
This agony that eats into my side,
This hurrying possessing of my blood,
This rat that gnaws me, this insatiable
And intimate infinity of pain
Will not delay: the ship, the ship delays!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Lie quietly, my lord; think not of this.

TRISTAN

Is the sail black or white? If it be black,
It is a shroud the colour of my hope.
The sail is white, say that the sail is white!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

What should the sail betoken?

TRISTAN

Why, my end.
It is the white wing of the bird in the sky
I saw out there, flying against the wind.
Why do you ask me what the white sail means?
If it be white——

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*eagerly*]

If it be white?

TRISTAN [*in a low voice, sinking back*]

I am saved.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*aside*]

If she is coming, it is the white sail;
But if she is not coming, the black sail.
[*To* TRISTAN.] What if it be the black sail?

TRISTAN [*faintly*]

The black sail,
I have forgotten what it means.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*moving towards the window*]

Now, now,
I am to do with this man what I will
For the first time. I hold him in both hands
Now. Am I still Iseult of the White Hands?
I have to give her signal to him, and for her
Tell him that she is coming. If she comes,
Who knows? It may be that the sail is black.
How can I see that sail and see it white?

TRISTAN [*feebly*]
There is no sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
There is no sail. The sea
Is empty, but the wind rises on it.

TRISTAN [*half unconscious*]
When we are dead——

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*running to the bedside*]
My lord!

TRISTAN
No, they shall sing
No evil songs of us when we are dead;
They shall sing songs of us.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
Oh!

TRISTAN
Happy lovers,
Because we drank one love out of one cup,
And death is not so sure.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY
Oh! Oh!

TRISTAN
Iseult,
(*Looking into vacancy.*) I have been faithful, Iseult.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*shrinking away*]

Now he sees
The other woman, and he cries to her.

TRISTAN

Give me the cup.

[*She takes up the cup from beside his bed and pours wine into it.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Here, Tristan! Here is wine.
See, I will set my lips to it——

TRISTAN [*snatching it from her*]

No, no,
You must not drink it. What is in the cup?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Wine for your thirst, Tristan.

TRISTAN

This is no wine.
You do not know what this is. Set it down.

[*She sets it down by the bedside.*

[*He again looks into vacancy.*

Have you forgotten, Iseult, and so soon?
It was not wine: I will not drink it twice,
I would not forget twice. Was it the cup
That put this faithful unforgetting fire
Into my marrow?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

No, it was the knife :
Do you not know ? the knife of Meriadoc.

TRISTAN

The blood of Morolt cries out of the knife,
Yet this is not his vengeance : it is hers.
It was for her he let her mother's poison
Into my side. You loved her, Meriadoc.
Have you loved better than I have ? Iseult,
Where are you gone ? You were here by my bed,
You would have healed me : some one thrust you back.
What are these white hands that I see, there, there,
Thrusting you back until you fade away ?
I cannot see you any longer. Who
Is this pale woman with the angry eyes ?
(*Looking at* ISEULT.) You are beautiful and yet I do not know you.

[ISEULT *covers her face with her hands.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I am not angry, but you kill my heart.
Do you not know me, Tristan ? Look at me.

TRISTAN

I pray you, do not weep ; but if you are
As pitiful as your weeping shows you, turn
And tell me if there is a sail upon the sea.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*going back to the window*]

Tristan, there is a sail !

TRISTAN

O do not mock me.
Is there indeed a sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Yes, yes, a sail.
The ship is close under the castle walls.
It comes around the corner of the rocks.
It is close now, quite close.

TRISTAN [*starting up*]

Did I not know
That I had but to call and she would come?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

He calls to her: he sees her in the ship.

TRISTAN

I have been lying in my grave, I think,
These years, and she is coming to waken me.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

These years, these years!

TRISTAN

All will be well.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Already
He does not know me with his eyes : his eyes
See her already, he smiles to welcome her.
There is a great joy in his eyes : it kills
My heart. She shall not take him from my heart.

TRISTAN

The sail ! the sail ! Look, look, can you not see
The colour of the sail ?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

What shall I say ?
Tears in my eyes blind me. I cannot see
What colour the sail is.

TRISTAN

The sail is white !

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

The wind is tossing it, and the sea leaps
After the ship. She will be in the ship.
O wind and sea, why were you merciful ?
She will be here. He sees her. What shall I say ?
I will not be her messenger to him.

TRISTAN

Look straight.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

I see, I see.

TRISTAN

Is the sail white ?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*slowly turning her eyes on* TRISTAN]

The sail is black.

TRISTAN [*after a pause, slowly, in a faint voice, looking straight in front of him with ecstatic eyes*]

God bless you, Iseult ; and good night.

[*He falls back dead.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*rushing forward and leaning over him*]

Tristan,
It is a white sail. She is coming, Tristan.
Lift up your head, listen : Iseult is here !

[*She tries to raise his head.*

O—h ! what have I done ? No, no,
Wake, wake, Tristan, and let me die for you !

[*She flings herself on the bed, then rises and cries.*

Ygraine ! Elaine ! Imogen ! He is dead.

[*The women rush in, followed by the* PHYSICIAN.

My lord is dead. I killed him, I myself.
Come closer. See, he is quite dead, quite dead.
You thought I loved him ; but I killed him. Yet
I only spoke a word.

[*She bursts into hysterical weeping.*

[*Her women support her.*

YGRAINE

Lead her away.
This sorrow is too heavy for her.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*to the* PHYSICIAN]

Sir,
You must awaken him : he is only sleeping.
You told me he would live till the ship came.
The ship is come. Why do you look at him
As if there were now nothing more to do ?
Can you not make him lift one of these lids
That cover his eyes down from seeing her ?
For he must see her. She is at the gate.
Wake him, wake him, and I will go away.

PHYSICIAN

Madam, I cannot wake him.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

But I will.
[*She leans over the bed.*
Will you not waken, and look on me once,
Tristan, before she comes ?

ELAINE

Come, lady.

IMOGEN

Come,
You will go wild with sorrow. Come with us.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY [*listens fearfully, hearing sounds without, then sits down by the bedside and takes hold of* TRISTAN'S *hand*]

Tristan, she is coming : do not let me go !

[*She stares fearfully at the door which is thrown open, and* ISEULT OF IRELAND *appears on the threshold.*

[BRANGAENE *follows her.*

[*The women stand about the bed on which* TRISTAN'S *body lies, with heads bent and drooping hands.*

[ISEULT OF IRELAND *looks through them to the dead body.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*on the threshold, to* BRANGAENE]

Tristan is dead, and there is nothing left
In all the world. I have not come too late.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Too late, too late ! I told him that the sail
Was black. I killed him. It was I who killed him.

ISEULT OF IRELAND

Comfort yourself, Iseult of Brittany,
And hide your head and weep, if you will weep,
Because it had to be, and leave me here.
You have done nothing in this mighty death.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY

Where shall I go ? for I have killed my lord.

[*She rises and with bowed head moves slowly away between her women, who lead her out of the door.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND [*going up to the bed*]

I kiss you for the last time on the mouth,
Tristan.

[*She bends over and kisses him, and then speaks over his body.*

He was the glory of the world;
All the world's dust, for Tristan can be dead.
This dust was once a fire and burned the stars:
Now what a little ashes holds the fire
That was blown out too early. There is nothing
Left in the world, and I am out of place.
Could you not wait for me until I came,
Tristan?

[*She lies down beside him and dies.*

BRANGAENE

Mistress! my life! O she is dead. O lady,
Now you have your desire and are at rest.
(*To the* ATTENDANTS.) Come nearer, all of you, lay them royally
And side by side, body by body. Come.
Lift up her head, that his may not outtop
The fairest head in the world. You shall lie so.
Have you no rich cloths to lay over them?
Bring something to make up a royal bed.

[*The* ATTENDANTS *bring forward rich cloths and lay over them.*

[BRANGAENE *arranges them with care.*

[*An* ATTENDANT *rushes in.*

ATTENDANT
The other ship is here. It is King Mark
With all his lords.

BRANGAENE
He is not to come in
Until this work is over. Is all ready?
[*The door is flung open and* KING MARK *rushes in, followed by his* LORDS.

KING MARK
Where is Iseult? Is Tristan here?

BRANGAENE [*going towards him and raising her hand to impose silence*]
No, King,
They are not here. Look where they were.
[*The* ATTENDANTS *draw aside, disclosing the two bodies.*
[KING MARK *comes forward.*

KING MARK
Is death
Treacherous? Has he gone faster than I could?
Could I not come upon them in one bed
But death must find them first? I am too late.
There is no room for my revenge.

BRANGAENE [*coming forward*]
O King,
There is no room here for revenge. These two
Drank from one cup, not knowing, the long sorrow
Now ended in this death.

KING MARK

The cup of love?

BRANGAENE

It was the cup of love: the Queen of Ireland
Prepared a cup of love to bind your heart
To hers who now lies dead: she on the ship
Drank ignorantly with him who now lies dead
The cup of love you should have drunk with her.
There had been love between you; but these have loved
Not well or ill, but of necessity.

KING MARK

Their love has wrought this evil of itself,
If it be evil to have died together.
Had I but known! Tristan, had I but known!
Had my son Tristan but had faith in me
And told me all the truth, then had I given
Iseult, whom I have loved, to be his wife.
But now has all this woe come to an end
In sorrow, and because we were all blind.
The woman whom I loved, and my one friend,
Lie here, and I am living still. So be it.
They shall be buried like a king and queen
Among the kings my fathers. Bear these two
Back to Tintagel. I will follow them.

THE END

THE HARVESTERS:

A Cornish Tragedy in Three Acts in Verse

THE PERSONS

Michael Raven.
Peter Corin.
Richard : *a boy.*

Mary Raven.
Ann Saundry.
Tamson Trembath.
Jane Angove.
Vecchan : *the village "innocent."*

Villagers, Passengers in the coach, a Sailor.
The Scene takes place at St. Ruan, a village in Cornwall, in the early part of the nineteenth century.

ACT I

MICHAEL RAVEN'S *cottage at St. Ruan. Three women, one old and two younger, are sitting at the kitchen table, drinking tea.* MARY RAVEN *stands by the open fire-place, as if she had just set the kettle back on the hearth.* ALL *are listening to the voice of* VECCHAN, *which is heard outside, as the Curtain rises, singing:*

Father cursed and Mother cried
(Ho! the sickle is in the corn).
It's a year ago to-day that I died
And a year ago I was born.

ANN SAUNDRY

It's only Vecchan: the poor innocent!
There's always death and birth in what she sings,
And she herself is like a crooked shadow
Bending bright things into dark images
That go before their feet.

TAMSON TREMBATH

She's in the wind
Always when there's a wind at night.

ANN

I heard her
Singing her song and calling to the sea
The night my John was drowned.

MARY RAVEN

I love the child.
She comes and talks to me when I'm alone.
She's wiser than most folk.

JANE ANGOVE

She frightens me.
I'm thinking she brings no one any luck.

MARY

She knows more things about us than we know.

ANN

It's only life and death and suchlike things
That matter; all the rest is like the wind,
And comes and goes. I knew my John was dead
Three days before they found him. When I saw
His body on the sand I had no tears left;
I had wept all the water of my eyes.

MARY

Ann, it's not we who know these things at all;
I say let be, and bide the time of them.

ANN

You never were the one to fret and talk
When fretting was no use, and talk worse help.
I mind me when your mother died, you went
Into the fields a-gleaning from her grave.

TAMSON

How's the old man?

MARY

He is well. He is old.

JANE

Old folks get questioning, old folks would know
More than there is to tell them ; does he now,
Your father, heed the neighbour's talk at all
Of Peter Corin ?

MARY

What should father hear,
Or heed ? But father's supper will be cold.
[*She goes over to the fire-place and moves a covered plate nearer to the fire.*

TAMSON

Mary, it's time to speak.

MARY

I haven't time
To listen : neighbours' talk is neighbours' talk.

TAMSON

Mary, don't say I ever said a word
Behind your back I wouldn't to your face :
My girl, I only want to be your friend.
You haven't lived, as I have, fifty years
To know what folks can do by telling tales :
You're young, and not afraid of people's tongues ;
Yet evil enough comes by people's tongues.

MARY

Evil enough : why do you tell me then
What I've no mind to hear ?

TAMSON

Why, for your good !
What I've been told I tell you, for your good
I tell you : is it nothing to a maid
That harvesters o'nights over their pipes,
Over their ale beside the furrow, say
It's time the banns were called at Ruan Church ?

ANN [*after a pause*]

It's getting dark.

MARY

I'll light the candle. Well ?
[*She lights a candle on the table.*

JANE ANGOVE

The fishermen at Cadgwith ask our men
Who's late enough abed to see o' nights
Peter and Mary on Goonhilly Downs.

MARY

He has his friends ; but they are not my friends :
If Peter is my friend, what's that to them ?

JANE

No, no my dear, don't you fly out on us ;
We're none of Peter's friends, only of yours.
Friend do you say ? Of Peter ? that's a word
A woman were best stint to any man,
And most of all to Peter. But some say
He's asked for you in marriage : I'll be bound
They know it best, and there's no harm at all.

MARY

No man has asked for me in marriage.

JANE

No ?
Then I'm mistaken, and no harm at all.

MARY

Why do they talk about us ? by what right ?
No man has any right to take my name
Into his pipe's smoke or his ale-house breath.

ANN [*getting up and coming to her*]

Don't heed them, Mary ; and let Tamson talk :
There's many things much worse to bear than talk,
You don't know what it is to sit and think,
And hear the wind, when you've a man at sea ;
Nor when there's nothing left to think of.

MARY

No,
I don't know that.

TAMSON

Ann's thinking all day long
Of things that won't be mended ; there are things
Thinking might mend.

ANN

They are not worth the thought :
It's not the real things you think about,
But women's words, fancies of boys and men,
The good name of a maid or of a man.
The good name of a maid or of a man
Is neither life nor death.

[*She goes back to the table.*

TAMSON

Talk as you will !
Her grief has made her strange of speech ; but you,
Mary, you'll have to listen, not to us,
But to the louder tones about the lanes,
That are too busy with you. Take my word,
The last to hear what everyone but he
Knows for a rumour, won't take long to know
Rumour from truth ; the first to know, my girl,
Will be your father. Though you'll not heed us,
You will heed him.

MARY

Here's father.

[*The door opens, and* MICHAEL RAVEN *comes in and looks at the three women, without looking at* MARY.

MICHAEL

A rough night. [*To Mary.*] My supper.

[*He sits down at the table where the knife and fork are laid for him.*

TAMSON

Have you been to chapel?

MICHAEL

Ay.

TAMSON

Did you see Nicholas there with Martha?

MICHAEL

No.

TAMSON

None of the neighbours?

MICHAEL

I went to seek the Lord,
And not the neighbours.

TAMSON

You are as bitter, Michael,
As if you had not found Him. When you hear
The preacher pray "Forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive them that have trespassed against us,"
How do you join in that? You'd not forgive
A neighbour's talk against you in his sleep.

MARY

Here is your supper, father. [*She sets it before him.*

JANE [*to* TAMSON *and* ANN]

Come, it's late ;
We were best moving, Michael.

MICHAEL [*eating*]

Not for me.

TAMSON

Mary, my shawl ; come, Ann, we're going. [*Aside to* MARY.] Mind, 'tis for your good we spoke. Michael, good-night.

MICHAEL

Good-night. [*The women slowly get up.*

JANE [*opening the door*]

'Tis a high wind.

ANN

What of the wind ?
There's no wind drowns a dead man in the sea.
[*They all go out.* MARY *closes the door.*

MICHAEL

What did that woman say ?

MARY

Nothing, father.

MICHAEL [*putting away his plate*]
Nothing, you say? Is it all nothing then
These women say to you? They say to me
Something much more than nothing.

MARY
Who, father?

MICHAEL
I ask you questions: is it a daughter's place
To stand before her father and say nothing,
And ask him to his face: who told you this?
Who told you that? Is it a daughter's place
To ask and not to answer?

MARY
When have I
Not done my duty, father? When have I
Not been a daughter to you?

MICHAEL
You have done
Your duty as a daughter: now will I do
My duty as a father. Stand you there,
Listen, and speak. Your mother was my wife
Nigh thirty years: and twenty years of youth:
She lived an honest woman, and so died:
And there was not an evil tongue of man
Wagged at her from the cradle to the grave.
God took her, and he left me in her place
You: and have I not done for you all things
A father in a mother's place could do?
Answer.

MARY

Yes, father.

MICHAEL

What I did for you
I did for her sake, and I promised her
I'd keep you a good girl, and fit for her,
Until the clods of the valley that I'd hoed
Had me and held me under. Honest, eh?
What's honesty if 'tis not honestly
Chronicled, current in the sight of the world?
I promised her you should keep pure the name
I gave her and she gave you: now, the name,
What have you done with what was once a pure,
Honourable and uncontaminated name?
The harvesters toss it among their chaff,
The fishers cast it loose out of their nets,
The women root it like a gaudy weed
Out of their gardens: Mary, answer me,
What have you done with it, the name, the name!

MARY

O father, you are cruel to me; stop;
What have I done, what can I say to you?
I think that if I told you all the truth
You would not now believe me.

MICHAEL

May be no,
It's not the truth I ask for: that's with God
Who knows, and when He wills for us to know
We shall know all, in order and due time.

If indeed you are guilty, and have sinned,
Wholly, and broken down the fence of God,
And made His temple an idolator's ;
If indeed you are guilty, I must speak
To another purpose ; but I ask of you
Why you have merely soiled, not cast away,
The reputation of an honest maid ?
You will say nothing ?

MARY

O father, be kind ;
I have been foolish, and I never thought.

MICHAEL

Has Peter Corin never thought for you ?

MARY

No, no, he hasn't thought. How could he know
There were so many listeners at doors,
Tale-bearers, spying eyes about the fields ?

MICHAEL

You say that they who listened could have heard,
And they who looked have seen, and they who told
Had truth to tell : do you say that ?

MARY

I say
Nothing ; I deny nothing.

MICHAEL

So ; that's plain.
You will say nothing if I ask you next
What I have said I would not ask you yet ?
You'll not lie, you'll say nothing ? Then, hear this :
If, as they say, you have sinned, and if your sin
Should find you out, and all men know your sin,
You are my daughter still, I give you bed,
I give you bread, and your child bed and bread ;
But, as God lives, and as He hears me speak,
I will not ever speak to you again ;
Not while I live, not when I die, and not
If we should meet before the throne of God !

[MARY *falls on her knees, in terror.* MICHAEL *rises, takes a candle, and goes upstairs.*

[*There is a tap at the door, which she does not hear ; then the door softly opens, and* PETER CORIN *comes in, closes it behind him, comes up to her, and touches her on the shoulder. She springs up and flings her arms round him.*

MARY

Peter ! no, no, don't speak ; kiss me ; 'tis you.
Put your arms round me, Peter, hold me fast.

PETER [*putting her from him*]

Mary, no foolishness : I don't come here
To whistle in the wind outside your door
And hear your father casting Bible texts
About like curses.

MARY

O, if you had heard
What father said ; you don't know what he said,
But he has burned my heart up with his words.

PETER

I heard him ranting like a Methody,
Mouthing out God, God, and the throne of God ;
I'll not come here if 'tis a chapel you keep.

MARY

Peter, Peter, be kind to me !

PETER

My dear,
I never was unkind to any woman
And you know best if I'm unkind to you.
If I came here to-night : you sent for me,
I don't know why, and yet, in spite of that,
I came for you and nothing else but you.
What do I find ? Your father's Bible texts
And you with white-lipped kisses frightening me !
What is the matter ? Did you want me here ?
Shall I go home again ?

MARY

Don't leave me now,
I wouldn't dare stay here.

PETER

Well, then, a kiss.
I want it, and I'll have it. And no words,
Not a half smile, no pretty word at all?
Is this your welcome?

MARY

I will try to smile;
I have no pretty words; such as I have,
I have more to speak than you would wish to hear.

PETER

That's like enough; what might they be about?

MARY

Do you still love me, Peter?

PETER

Why, of course.

MARY

Just as you did?

PETER

Just as I always did.

MARY

Peter, I haven't any other friend.

PETER

O yes, you have : I met a friend of yours.

MARY

Who ?

PETER

Vecchan, singing some old crazy song.
She humped her crooked back at me and ran.
She hates me. All such misbegotten brats
Ought to be drowned, and not be let to live.

MARY

She loves me, and a body that can love
Is good enough to live. I envy her,
For she can see the other side of things,
Like our dreams can.

PETER

What's dreaming ? Good enough
For beggars.

MARY

She is happier than we are.
Her life is all one dream : she lives on alms
And takes them as fine ladies might take gifts ;
She told me that her cottage walls were gold
And that she was the daughter of a King.

PETER

She fools you with her folly : are you wise ?
The brat's a gallows-child and bides no luck.
I hate her, and I hate her apish brain,
And wits askew like her misshapen back.

MARY

It isn't right of you to say these things ;
It frightens me to hear you. But don't speak
Of Vecchan if it angers you : be kind :
Father is angry with me : people talk :
You know how people talk about us two.

PETER

Talk ? let them talk ; what harm is people's talk ?

MARY

Father believes them.

PETER

What can he believe ?
There's nothing known, there's nothing to be known.
Keep quiet, my good girl, we're safe enough.

MARY

No, no, there's nothing safe ; for you and me
There's nothing safe.

PETER

Well, maybe not for me.
You've never thought of what *I* have to lose,
If this should come to light and be the talk ?
Why some day I might want to wed three barns,
Five acres, an old maid thrown in to boot.
I'm quite a likely fellow.

MARY

No, not that,
I'll not think that of you against yourself,
Not on your oath.

PETER

A man must have his joke.
Still, they do talk ; and it does me no good.
Look here, we'll be more careful. Now to-night,
If someone saw me waiting by the door
Until the old man's candle goes upstairs,
Well, they might think, they might say what they thought,
And what they said might not be good for us.
I'll be more careful.

MARY

You'll not come at all !
I know ! You've had enough of me, and now
You will be careful. Yes, I know the word :
Careful to drop me like a red-hot coal
Out of your clean, honest and open hand !

PETER

No, Mary, I am not that sort of man.
I don't play fast and loose with what I like.
I take things and I keep things ; if you think
I mean to let you go, come here no more,
Not meet you on the downs, not hold you, no,
As long as I've a mind to ; let you be
The miss again, the go-to-chapel miss ;
You're wrong ! I don't let go of what I've got ;
Now are you mine or not, eh ?

MARY [*putting her arms around him*]

O, all yours,
There's nothing in me, Peter, that's not yours.

PETER

Why, that's all right. If there's a rarer girl
From sea to sea in Cornwall, or a girl
That's better loved by any Cornish chap,
Miner or fisherman or harvestman,
Back me against Tregeagle : I'll out-dredge
Dosmare Pool with half his limpet-shell !

MARY

Don't say these things : they make me feel afraid.
If we're too certain of ourselves, you know
Something is sure to happen. I hardly dare
To think how happy we have been.

PETER

Why not ?

MARY

Do you remember how we used to meet
By Vecchan's cottage on the downs ?

PETER

I do.

MARY

I always was the first. Night after night
I crept away, and came across the fields,
Until I felt the first wind from the heath.
And I would stand and drink great draughts of wind
Till I was drunken with the honey and salt,
And drunken with the night, and then you came
With all the salt and honey in your lips.

PETER

They were rare nights.

MARY

I never thought of you
Without the thought of honey and of salt
And of that first wind blowing from the heath,
A windy place, a no-man's land, a harsh
Unfriendly place where it is good to be.
All other men belong to the tilled fields,
And are as orderly as ranks of corn,
And cattle in the valley ; only you
Belong to the long heath that never ends,
And to the wind blowing to the heath's end.

PETER

It's only on the heath a man feels free.

MARY

I used to go alone there, long ago,
That was before we went together ; then,
I walked for miles along the empty road,
Between the gorse and heather, all alone,
And heard the birds singing, and felt as free
As they were : now I couldn't go alone
And feel so free : I couldn't be free now.

PETER

I wouldn't let you free, Mary, by God !

MARY

You'll never let me free now, Peter ?

PETER

No.

MARY

Not even if——

PETER

What do you mean by if ?

MARY

If people talked against me ; if they came
To cast your name into my teeth, and I
Stood shamed, and father cast me off from him ;
If what is secret now between us two
The children talked about us in the roads ;
If——

PETER

All your ifs are less than one round nought ;
There's nothing except one thing left to fear ;
And that, well, we'll know that before they do.

MARY

If there were reason for the people's talk ?

PETER

How could there be a reason for their talk ?

MARY

I do not say there is, but if there were ?

PETER

Out with the truth, Mary, out with the truth !

MARY

Peter, you'll not be angry if I speak ?

PETER

I want to know the truth, only the truth.

MARY

O God, it's true.

PETER

If this is some damned lie!

MARY

O, it's no lie, it's nothing but the truth.

PETER

Fool!

MARY

No, don't, Peter, don't! you'll kill me.

PETER

If
It's after all some trick, some trap of yours——

MARY

It's true, Peter, as true as misery,
And wretched as the misery of truth.

PETER

Now I know how the pleasure of a man
Ends; I am caught, and shamed, and fooled: for what?
A woman, a woman, to the end of time!

MARY

Have you no pity? won't you think of me,
Peter, and all the suffering and the shame,
And all because I loved you? Father says
He'll never speak a word to me again:
You'll not forsake me, Peter, and because
I loved you more than any woman should?
Say that you love me, Peter, just the same!

PETER

What's done is done.

MARY

Peter!

PETER

They knew, it seems;
I didn't know; you never told me. Eh,
Why did you never tell me? Stand and speak!

MARY

What do you mean?

PETER

You don't know what I mean?
How do I know that what you mean means me?

MARY

Peter!

PETER

Well?

MARY

Do you want an answer?

PETER

No.

MARY

If you would have an answer you must wait
Till God makes me another kind of woman
And you the man I took for you till now.

PETER

Come, I meant nothing. Put it out of mind.
What's done is done, and there's no more to say.

MARY

What shall we do? what's left for us to do?

PETER

What should I do? what could I do, my lass?
There's nothing to be done: bide still and wait.

MARY

You'll let me wait until I come to shame.
I thought my father loved me: now I need
The help of love, he casts me from his heart.
He's kinder than you are.

PETER

There's time enough.

MARY

You speak to me as if you hate me now,
And I repent that I have trusted you
With all my shame : you hate me for my shame,
You won't be honest with me any more.

PETER

Mary, we've only done like other folks ;
They don't get found out : we're to be found out.
Whose fault is that ? I say it isn't fair.
There's something in the world that isn't fair.

MARY

O Peter, won't you put wrong things to rights
And mend the world ? If every man did that,
We women would be out of the world's harm.

PETER

What can I mend ? I didn't make the world,
It's made all of a piece, it's made for them
That go to chapel and sleep sound o' nights,
It's not made for such women and such men
As you and I are : as for mending it,
I haven't any mind to : let it go.

MARY

But, Peter, it won't let us live our lives ;
It comes between us and the face of the sun ;
We cannot fight against things as they are.

PETER

Did I not tell you ? Things are as they are ;
We have to make the best of them. Now come ;
Don't think about this thing that can't be helped.
There's time enough. We'll talk of it again.

MARY

There's nothing now but this to think about,
And what's the good of talking ?

PETER

Little use.
No sort of use to-night. [*He gets up as if to go.*

MARY

You're going ?

PETER

Ay.

MARY

Now you don't want to kiss me.

PETER [*seizing her in his arms*]

But I do,
But I will, Mary, till come never-mass.

MARY

Now let me go.

PETER

And don't you dream of it.
And, Mary, don't you say a word of this.

MARY

What should I say to anyone but you?
The children will all know it soon enough.

PETER

Bide still and wait, my lass.

[*He kisses her, and goes out. She stands motionless for a moment, then goes to the fire, takes a twist of paper, and lights a candle. She takes up the candle and goes slowly across the room towards the stairs*

MARY [*with a bitter laugh*]

Bide still and wait!

THE CURTAIN

ACT II

The harvest field in August. MICHAEL RAVEN *is lying asleep under a hayrick;* TAMSON, ANN, *and* JANE *stand near him looking down on him, holding sickles in their hands.*

TAMSON

He is asleep; we'll wait until he wakes;
He has been sharpening sickles all the day:
An old man's labour, but too much for him.

ANN

How old he looks.

JANE

You'd hardly say 'twas he,
The Michael Raven of a year ago.

ANN

True, trouble packs an old man's back with years,
Twice his own bundle.

TAMSON

We will let him sleep
Where he has made a bed out of the shade.
Let us sit down: this shade is comfortable,

And such a harvest sun to dry the corn,
And soak to the very marrow of our bones
I have not known these thirty or more years.

ANN

Well, well, my back is almost broken in two
With gathering up the corn into my arms
And stooping down with every sickle-stroke.

JANE

It's good to rest; there's none of the twelve hours
That hasn't got its corner on the clock
Marked out for resting.

ANN

Mary never came.

JANE

Better she didn't: she's too near her time.
It's cruel for a woman when she needs
To lie abed, whether she's rich or poor,
To have to crawl about a harvest field,
Even to glean a handful.

TAMSON

She will come,
I am sure of it, for she came yesterday,
Though she was shaking like a blade of grass
That stands as cold as water in the sun.

ANN

Look at her father. How can he sleep there
As quiet as a child? I saw him smile,
As if he dreamed: how can he sleep, I say,
When Mary hasn't where to lay her head?

TAMSON

You are unjust: you never can be just:
He has been cruel to her, that is true,
Not heartless, for he gives her bed and board.

ANN

Not heartless? well, he gave her bed and board
(And little praise it's like to be to him)
Until three nights ago; but these three nights—

JANE

Hush, he is waking!

TAMSON

No, he moved in sleep.

ANN

These three nights past she's had no bed, or had
The heather for a bed: cold charity:
Night and the wind upon Goonhilly Downs!
And if her father thrust her out of doors,

Or if the girl was crazed and couldn't sleep,
I don't well know, and see small difference.
That man would be as righteous as God is :
Look you what comes to men of righteousness !

TAMSON

You're hard upon him.

ANN

He was hard on her.
What is a father for, if not to help
His children when they need him, and to love
His children when they're far beyond his help ?
It is so soon they get beyond his love,
And are no more than bodies that won't stir
For any father ; then a father knows
That nothing matters except life and death ;
Then he learns pity, when it is too late
To pity but himself.

TAMSON

He was too hard,
For we are all but sinners : a hard man :
But it was not for nothing, as we thought ;
He had good cause. Who thought, when you and I
Bade Mary be more careful of her name,
That all the care was over ?

JANE

Ay, who thought ?

ANN
Why, I did. There are women who step in
Knee-deep into the slough, and then step back
A little fouled, and wash their feet of it,
And go their way. But she's not one of such.
If Mary gave her heart to any man
She would keep nothing over; and for that,
She is the cleaner and the honester,
And liker to her father. He and she,
Father and daughter, have an equal will:
His will not bend and hers can only break.

JANE
He has not spoken to her, so they say,
Since he knew all.

TAMSON
Not a word, not one word.
No wonder the poor girl is well-nigh crazed,
To sit by the same fire, and to eat food
At the same table, and not speak, and not
Be answered if you speak.

ANN
They die of silence,
He on this side, she on that side of the fire;
And as she droops and withers he grows old.

JANE
Will nothing bend his will?

ANN
Nothing on earth;
Because he takes it for the will of God.

I passed outside the window one dark night,
And heard, as I thought, voices, and looked in ;
And she was kneeling on the kitchen floor,
And lifting up her hands and bowing down
Her proud white face upon them ; and I heard
Such a poor pitiful and loving prayer
For pity, that I could not listen to it.

JANE

Did not he listen ?

ANN

Turned his head, and sat,
Not moving, like a thing frozen to stone ;
But as I looked into his eyes and saw
All that was in them, he not knowing it,
They seemed to flicker like a flame that burns
Quite out to ashes.

JANE

There is Peter Corin ;
Coming this way.

[PETER CORIN, *carrying a sickle in his hand, crosses the cornfield and, seeing the women, stops, takes out his pipe, and is going to speak, when he catches sight of* MICHAEL RAVEN *lying asleep ; he shrugs his shoulders, puts his pipe in his mouth again, and passes on. Presently he is seen at work at the other end of the field, and remains there throughout the next part of the scene.*

ANN

Let sleeping dogs lie, eh ?
It isn't Peter Corin who would come
Nearer to Michael Raven in his sleep
Than half the field's length.

TAMSON

A man fears a man
When he has robbed him ; but *he* need not fear.

ANN

But he has cause to fear him.

TAMSON

What of that ?
It is himself, and his own flesh and blood,
That Michael can't forgive ; as for the man
Who wronged him, he's a sinner, and not saved ;
But Michael's saved, and Mary, if she sins,
Sins doubly, having once been saved from sin.

ANN

Is that religion ?

TAMSON

No, it's vanity
Of the spirit, pride of virtue, self itself,
Under a garment of humility.
Only, I pity Michael more than her
That he's unfathered, for the father in him
Dies with worse agonies.

JANE
Hush! he is waking up.
[MICHAEL *sits up and looks round him.*

MICHAEL
Where are your sickles?

TAMSON
Here. You have been asleep.
We were tired too, and waited till you woke.

MICHAEL [*getting up*]
Give me the sickles; I will sharpen them.
[*He begins to sharpen them*]
I have done wrong to sleep away my time.
I'm a hired servant, I am hired to work,
Not sleep.

ANN
You will work better if you rest.
Rest awhile longer, till the heavy heat
Of the full middle of the day is past.

MICHAEL
I have my work to do. You can be idle.
I do not judge you, though you waste the hours
In sitting idly while I lie asleep:
You should have wakened me to do my work.
[RICHARD, *a boy, comes up with a sickle.*

RICHARD
Here, Master Raven, Peter Corin says
His sickle will not cut.

MICHAEL

Give it to me.
It wants a better edge. I'll sharpen it.
[*He puts it down.*

RICHARD

You'll do it now, though, Peter Corin says ?

MICHAEL [*laying down the other sickle, and taking it up*]

Yes, I will do it now. This one can wait.

TAMSON

You call us idle : have you worked like us,
Stooping above the corn and cutting it
In armfuls for the binders, and with all
The sun's weight like a haystack on our backs ?

MICHAEL

My business is to sharpen this good steel
So that the sickles may be sharp to cut
The corn before the night comes, or the rain.
If I should sleep now, and not sharpen them,
Or leave a broken edge upon the blade,
There would be less good bread in ovens, less
Women and children fed : see how things hang
Upon an old man's shoulders ! if I leave
One sickle dull, one duty not well done,
The proper course of things may go to wrong,
One of God's ordinances may fail !

ANN

Who knows?
I'd not be looking out so far for them,
But nearer home, Michael.

MICHAEL

What's to be done
Is nearest home: this is my work: do yours.

TAMSON

Well, well.

MICHAEL [*to* RICHARD]

Here is your sickle: I have put
A better edge upon it: it will serve
Until it is too dark to see the corn.

[RICHARD *takes the sickle back to* PETER CORIN.

TAMSON

Give us our sickles.

[*They get up and move a few steps away.*

MICHAEL

Yours is nearly done.

ANN [*aside*]

Look, there is Mary: past that arish-mow.

JANE [*aside*]

She sees us: not her father.

ANN [*aside*]

Let her come.

MICHAEL

Your sickle has a duller edge than that.
It will not come so sharp.

TAMSON [*aside*]

She is past work.

[MARY *comes in, dragging herself along painfully. She only sees the women.*

MARY

I have come without a sickle
Because I am too weak to reap the corn;
What can I do to help you?

ANN

Come with us.

MICHAEL [*to* TAMSON]

Here is your sickle. These are not so dull.
But I will bring them to you.

[MARY, *hearing his voice, turns, and stands looking at him without a word, while he goes on with his work, not lifting his eyes.*

TAMSON

Come with us.

MARY

O no, not now : leave me alone with him.
I will speak to him, and I will come to you.

JANE

Best come with us.

TAMSON

You see she will not come.

ANN

Leave her alone : her silence will plead now
If ever any words will.

[*They go out.* MARY *speaks, slowly, with a pause between each section.* MICHAEL *goes on with his work, not lifting his eyes.*

MARY

Father ! . . . Father ! . . . Father !
I must speak, and, if you'll not hear me now,
I think that I shall curse you ; yet not I :
God would forgive me : not your daughter : only
This tongue that you must reverence ; for it speaks
Not from my heart, but deeper, from the womb.
If you will hear me, I'll not ask one word,
Not a look ; do not even turn to me,
Or seem to hear ; but you will hear me. Else,
If I go mad and curse you, you may die
Without God's pity.
God must pity me,
If He has that for any woman ; sure,

No woman wants it more ; and he must know
That I have had no pleasure in my sin
That might have made it harder to forgive.

Father, I could not sleep under your roof :
These three nights past I have not slept but lain
On the poor friendly pillow of the ground
Until the dreadful morning. The cold wind
Has been more kind to me than your charity,
And if I could have slept, for thoughts, my sleep
Would have been sounder. And I heard the cry
Of the companionable morning birds
And all the little voices of the heath,
Instead of cruel silence, which shuts up
Your heart into a stone. I could go mad
To see you and be silent, as if you were
The gaoler of a madwoman. And yet
I must not, and I have to live.
Father,
I am your child, my child will be your child :
Have pity !
Sometimes I could wish to die ;
I would have died, but now I must not die ;
And, father, you are killing me ; each day
A little more of silence eats my heart.
Old man, I am not asking in my name
Pity ; I have forgotten if I was
Your daughter once, a mother for her child
Cries, and must not be silenced.
God make you dumb
As you are deaf, and as you turn my blood

Into a frenzy, may a stony cold
Freeze up your veins ; and as you kill in me
Bone of the bones you made, flesh of my flesh,
May God forgive you only when I do !

[*She flings herself on her face on the ground. As she says the last word,* VECCHAN *steals in, with an affected air, dressed in grotesque finery, with ribbons flying. She is about sixteen, small, and slightly hunchbacked. She carries in her hand a wreath of corn and poppies.*

VECCHAN

Wicked old man ! I'll not see you at church.
You are not to be admitted. Get you gone.

MICHAEL [*rising and taking up the two sickles, without looking at* MARY]

Vecchan, you had no right to take that corn.

[*He goes out.* VECCHAN *bends over* MARY.

VECCHAN

I have been looking for you in all the fields ;
I had to find you. Why are you crying ? It is I
Who ought to be crying, and, listen ! because of you
I am very, very happy. The king my father
Has taken away my crown of ruby and gold,
Because I will marry no man ; but have you forgot
That this is your wedding-day ? Do you hear the bells ?
I have brought you a crown of corn and poppies, see,
But you are to say that they are ruby and gold ;
And we'll go to church in the morning.
Come !

[*She tries to raise her.*

MARY

No, child,
I am too tired ; and I shall not be happy
Any more now.

VECCHAN

That's strange ; but take it, take it.
[*She thrusts the garland into her hands*]
You'll not be tired soon ; when you are married and have children
You can lie abed in the morning, and say your prayers without kneeling.

MARY [*raising herself*]

Why have you brought me poppies ? Did you guess
How much I must forget now ?

VECCHAN

O no, O no,
The poppies are for rubies, and they're for blood,
And blood is red, and red is the king's colour.
But you're not listening.

MARY

Yes, I am listening.

VECCHAN

No one but you must know, till afterwards.
Now listen ; shall I tell you some of the wedding-guests ?

MARY

Yes, tell me.

VECCHAN [*counting on her fingers*]

There is our grandmother the Earth,
And she is hooded with a great green bonnet of leaves,
And wears a green robe ; and Our Lady the sea,
Who has come with the skipping young waves in her train
And she wears blue ; and this, you cannot well see
For the cloak of clouds he is wrapped in, is the Wind ;
And some of our poor relations, the kind beasts,
Have come too. But do you want to know the presents ?

MARY

Yes, tell me.

VECCHAN

No, I'll not tell you : wait and see.
The sexton is bringing them in a big black bag,
And he has a spade on his shoulder.
[*Sings*]

Who'll dig the grave for my true love ?
My true love was he.
My new love, my new love, my new love,
My new love and me.

But the morning's for burying, and the noon to wed in
And at night we are all born ; and then begins life everlasting.

MARY

Do you love me, Vecchan ?

VECCHAN

O yes, dearly, dearly,
And so does the king's son.
There's many against the match, but the king is for it ;
Never fear but you shall be brought to bed of three princes.
[*Sings*]
Three pearls in the king's crown :
The king came riding into town
On Michaelmas day in the morning.
Turn the pennies in your pocket, for at the turn of the moon
We shall all be changed.

MARY

Will you change too, and leave me ?

VECCHAN

Only if the king my father calls me to his court,
But I wouldn't go unless you could come with me too.
They say the old king is evil and afraid of God,
But I know it is not so, for he goes out in the sunlight,
And I can prove it to you with any two wisps of straw.

MARY

Shall I come with you, Vecchan ?

VECCHAN

No, not now,
You can join us, though, after the funeral:
That will be in the other world: I have said my prayers.
But Death is a reaper, and we are corn for his sickle.
[*Sings*]

Ho! the sickle is in the corn.

[*She catches sight of* PETER CORIN, *who comes forward with his sickle in his hand*]

But here comes the devil reaping: save me, save me!

[*She runs away.* PETER CORIN *comes forward, lays his sickle on the ground, and stands in front of* MARY.

PETER

Is the mad wench gone?

MARY

You made her.

PETER

I.

MARY

By coming.

PETER

Is that the only greeting that I get?

MARY

I came to seek you.

PETER

Yes, and found your father,
And got no good by it. Why have you been strange,
Why have you hid yourself among the folk?
How long is it since I had a word with you?

MARY

I came to speak with you; but now I think
All speaking must be useless. I have spoken,
But now, with one who loved me more than you,
My father; I have prayed as one prays God,
And he was silent as God also is.
Why should I speak with you? what should we say
That's not been said already? There's nothing more
To talk of for a while.

PETER

Yes, many things.
Why have you hid yourself away from me?
Why must I be a stranger all at once?
What does this mean?

MARY

What do you want of me?

PETER

Tell me one thing, Mary: where did you sleep
These last three nights?

MARY
Upon the heath.

PETER
For choice ?

MARY
For choice.

PETER
He didn't turn you out of doors ?

MARY
I have but to make my bed and lay my plate.

PETER
You will not ?

MARY
No, I will not.

PETER
In God's name,
Why, at all times, and mostly at this time ?

MARY
At this time chiefly.

PETER
You are mad.

MARY

Maybe ;
But I still keep my memory.

PETER

What is this ?

MARY

I must be free or die.

PETER

Are you not free ?

MARY

Free ? when I must be silent, catch my breath,
Pen up my sighs, quench my tears, teach those thoughts
That would cry loud and fly far, as with wings,
To shut themselves in prison.

PETER

Better bide
Under a roof, although you call the roof
A prison.

MARY

Do you judge for me ?

PETER

Why not ?

MARY

Because I have gone clean out of your hands,
And now I do not think a thought of yours
Or heed you when you bid me.

PETER

Now that's strange,
I thought I knew you, and I thought you knew
Me. But you do not know me, it would seem.

MARY

You have been teaching me.

PETER

You'll say perhaps,
Because you are sick and angry——

MARY

I will say ?

PETER

You'll say you never loved me.

MARY

Shall I say it ?
How much I loved you, why should I say now
When nothing matters ? you yourself said once
Things kinder than you thought : yet, when you said them,
I shut the eyes up of my own belief
That they should see no falsehood.

PETER

What was false ?

MARY

Your kisses were all changelings.

PETER

No, not that.
And that you know; you know as well as I.
I cared for you, I made you care for me;
You've not forgotten, nor yet I; you know
How little breath I wasted upon wind,
But when I said "Mary, I'll come to-night,"
Or "Meet me here to-morrow," did I come?
Tell me, now, did I meet you?

MARY

Yes, you came.

PETER

And is that nothing? When you talk of love
I don't mean like a sandpiper in spring,
With songs and antics: I mean more than that:
I cared for you, as a man can; by God,
I never left you and I never would
If you would let me.

MARY

My father cast me off;
You do not cast me off. O no, your greed
Clutches with all its fingers at the crumbs
They scattered from the table.

PETER

What does this mean?
Have you forgotten to be friends with me?

MARY

Yes, clean forgotten. What I have to do
Leaves no room over for remembering.
And I should have forgotten that you were,
As one forgets a bad dream; but I wake
And this that moves in me remembers you.

PETER

Mary, be friends with me again; I say
You must.

MARY

Ay, let's be merry. We shall have
The strangest weeping comedy.

PETER

You choose
To wring my words awry out of my mouth,
But this is spoken honest.

MARY

Honest? No!
How long since have you parted? honesty
Will not remember you. O no, no, no,
I am not here to rail or wrangle with you.
Leave me alone: if you have any pity,
Leave me.

PETER

I will not leave you. Do you hear?
I am your master.

MARY

You? my master? no.
I have another master than you are,
Nearer to me than you were ever, made
Out of my love that I might hate you for it.

PETER

And yet I am your master and your child's.

MARY

Why do you say that? what is it you mean?
O no, you don't mean anything.

PETER

I mean
More than I say.

MARY [*rising and clinging to him*]

No, no, don't say these things
Because you pity me a little, no,
Or I shall hate you; for you never speak
The whole truth out; and it will do no good.

PETER

Mary, don't think I mean to give you up:
You knew I never meant to give you up.
Why have you been so strange to me?

MARY

Because
I am to be the mother of your child.

PETER

But you don't hate me?

MARY

Peter, I am now
Disowned for it, dishonoured, pointed at
By children's fingers, whipped by women's tongues;
I was the proudest girl in Ruan: now
The meanest can look down on me. And for this
I have hated you; not for my sake; because
I was to be the mother of a son
Who should be shamed in me his mother. Now,
You'll do me right at last!

PETER

Why, what is this?

MARY

I never dared to speak to you, I thought
You had tired of me, I said it in my heart
Each day before I saw you and each night
After I'd seen you, but I never dared
To say it to your face. Only I prayed
Sometimes, between my father's silences,
And then the hope was stronger. You are sure
You want me still, and you could love me still?

PETER

Of course I want you : are you mad ? you think
I'd give you up to any other man
While I can swing a sickle ? You have been strange
And angry with me. I knew how to wait.
We'll have good times again. That you should think
I'd ever let you go !

MARY

You'll not ? You'll not ?

PETER

I'll never let you go.

MARY

I am too glad.
What is it that keeps turning in my head ?
I am giddy, but with joy : O dreadful joy !
But you're not lying to me ? you mean truth ?
You'll marry me ?

PETER

I'll—I'll be good to you.

MARY

You'll make me honest before all the world ?
You'll marry me in church ?

PETER

Who talked of church?
We didn't need the church six months ago.

MARY

You'll marry me?

PETER

No, I'll not *marry* you!

[MARY *recoils from him, and the voice of* VECCHAN *is heard singing "Ho! the sickle is in the corn!"*

But, as God lives,—

[*He steps towards her, holding out his arms.*

MARY

Does God live?

[*She snatches up* PETER'S *sickle and stabs him with it; he falls without a word. As she stands, rigid, and holding the sickle in her hand,* VECCHAN *comes in, goes up to her, and touches her on the arm.*

VECCHAN

Put down the sickle, for the harvest is all in.

THE CURTAIN

ACT III

The Market-place in St. Ruan. MICHAEL RAVEN *is sitting on a bench against a wall;* RICHARD, *a boy of ten, stands before him.*

RICHARD

What's murder, Michael? is it killing folk?

MICHAEL

Ay, lad.

RICHARD

And are folk killed for killing them?

MICHAEL

That's as the law will have it.

RICHARD

What's the law?

MICHAEL

The law is what makes rules of right and wrong,
What you may do and what you may not do,
And punishes you if you do the wrong.

RICHARD

What does the law do if you do the right ?

MICHAEL

Nothing.

RICHARD

But is it right to kill a man
Because he killed another ?

MICHAEL

It may be.

RICHARD

Is the law always right ?

MICHAEL

It's always law ;
Whatever the law says, has to be done.

RICHARD

Who made the law ? did God ?

MICHAEL

Man made the law.

RICHARD

Does God know more than those that made the law ?

MICHAEL

Ay.

RICHARD

Then why doesn't God speak out?

MICHAEL

That's it;
Why doesn't God speak out and save His truth?
What does the law know of the truth of God?
These hands have blood upon them, and look clean,
Not in God's sight, but in the sight of the law;
And even her most awful hands, that struck
Where I had but aided guilt innocently,
Her hands that are to bear upon their palms
Always the weight of a soul unprepared
And unforgiven, that now lives in hell,
They are also called clean.

RICHARD

What do you say,
Michael?

MICHAEL

These hands, these hands! What did I say?

RICHARD.

Tell me, I want to know, and you must know,
Is Mary free?

MICHAEL

She's coming back to-day.

RICHARD

They put her into prison ?

MICHAEL

She was tried.

RICHARD

But if she did kill Peter Corin, why
Didn't the law kill her ?

MICHAEL

I have asked that.

RICHARD

Was it the baby ? did he save her life ?

MICHAEL

Yes, I suppose so ; she was mad, they said ;
They said she didn't know.

RICHARD

Then is she mad ?

MICHAEL

No, she's not mad : no madder than I am.

RICHARD

Well, you are queer, you know.

MICHAEL

You think so, too ?
Why do you think so ?

RICHARD

You are always talking
To yourself, and when you talk to me you say
Things I don't understand. And then your hands
Are always shaking, and your head shakes, too.

MICHAEL

I am old, I am old ; how old I am
Only my sorrow knows.

RICHARD

Why do you look
At me so sadly ? When will Mary come ?

MICHAEL

She will come soon enough. My punishment
Cannot be long in coming.

RICHARD

I'll go and see
If I can see the coach.

[*A neighbour crosses the square, and stops by* MICHAEL *while* RICHARD *runs away and looks down the road.*

NEIGHBOUR

Good evening, Michael.
Might you be waiting for the coach?

MICHAEL

I am.
Why do you want to know?

NEIGHBOUR

I want to know
Nothing but if 'tis in from Helston yet?

MICHAEL

No, it is not.

NEIGHBOUR

Then I'll have time, I think,
To go up home-along.

[*He goes on.* RICHARD *runs back.*

RICHARD

It isn't coming.

MICHAEL

It will come soon enough. Things come, things come,
We cannot hinder them. Richard, my boy,
Tell me, now tell the truth, was it not you
That brought me Peter's sickle in the field?

RICHARD

I did. I said to you : Peter Corin says,
Please, Michael, will you sharp his sickle up ?
And you said : I will put an edge upon it
So that it cuts until the sun goes down.

MICHAEL

And then you took it back to him ?

RICHARD

I did.
And Peter Corin drew his finger down
The edge of it, and said : Well sharped, old man !

MICHAEL

You only carried death between your hands,
But I gave death help, made death sure with mine.
Why did not God wither up these old hands
Sooner ? they shake with age, yet these old hands
Are guilty.

RICHARD

Why do you speak as if you spoke
To someone ? there is no one here but me.

MICHAEL

No, no, it was the ordinance of God,
He set it like a trap to snare my soul ;
And I am caught, and the teeth meet in me.

I am to see this stain upon my soul
That I may know myself for what I am
And taste God's mercy in His punishment.
She must come back to me with all her sin,
The murderess and the adulteress
Must sit beside me, sleep under my roof;
She must bring blood across my threshold; God
Has made my seed a wasting and a plague.
And I must not be pardoned. Though I sinned
I must not pardon. I have sworn an oath,
And I must keep it: I must set these hands,
Though they are shaking, I must build up again
With these old hands silence like a strong wall.

RICHARD

Michael, what is adulteress?

MICHAEL

A word
Out of the Bible.

RICHARD

Is that all? I thought
You spoke of Mary; she's a murderess,
Isn't she?

MICHAEL

This also is my punishment.

[*Villagers begin to come in, and stand about as if waiting.* RICHARD *goes up to them.*

VILLAGER
The coach is late.

SECOND VILLAGER
The coach is always late.

FIRST VILLAGER
There are too many alehouses to pass.

SECOND VILLAGER
Too many Cornish hills : it's cruel work,
For any pair of horses on our roads.

SAILOR [*with a bundle*]
You think so ? well, you haven't been in Spain.

THIRD VILLAGER
I haven't : what of Spain ?

SAILOR
They say in Spain
Beasts are not Christians, and they haven't souls :
Bodies they have though, and they martyr them
Worse than they martyred Christians.

THIRD VILLAGER
Is that so ?

SAILOR
Horses ? they're not. Skinfuls of rattling bones,
Like drums for devils to beat tunes upon.
Don't pity the fat nags that pull your coach.

First Villager

You've travelled, sir.

Sailor

Not yet to London, sir.
Many a time I've passed the mouth of Thames,
But never nearer.

[Ann, Tamson, *and* Jane *come in, and stand together at the opposite side from* Michael.

Tamson

Look, there's Michael!

Jane

Where?

Tamson

He's sitting on the bench against the wall.
His eyes are on the ground: he does not see us.

Jane

He will not look at us.

Tamson

It's hard on Michael.
A just hard man, a God-abiding man,
That's been twice chastened for his daughter's sins.
What will he do? how can he let her come
Under his roof, she being what she is?

ANN

Where should she go ?

TAMSON

Where is there she can go ?

JANE

It's hard on Mary. She should not come back.
It's a bold thing of Mary to come back.
But are you sure that she will come to-day ?

ANN

There has been word from Bodmin, from the gaol.
Somehow, by now, I think all Ruan knows :
Look at our folk : there's a strange sailor too ;
Why should they flock to see a girl come home,
As if she were a waxwork in a show ?

TAMSON

They're not all come for Mary. If they were ?
I'm not come here to pry upon her, Ann ;
I'll go before she comes. But, do you think
Michael will take back and break his oath ?

ANN

He will not break his oath : he'll take her back.
He's waiting for her there, and he will wait
Until she comes ; but he'll not speak to her,
Nor then nor never. I'm to bring her home,

Instead of him, and he has put the words
Into my mouth he will not say to her :
He told me word for word ; I'm not to say
A syllable beyond, a syllable less,
Not to show any kindness in the words,
Not to say less than the bare truth of them.

TAMSON

She's got a home then : well, I'm glad of it ;
She'll need it, and what has she now to tell
But bitter tears, and what belongs to God ?
She'll never want to lift her voice again
When she has seen her father.

ANN

Hush, he'll hear.
He's not so old and not so broken down
He'll let himself be pitied.

JANE

Do you think
That she is free now, just as we folk are ?
She killed the man : we saw him lying dead
And her with the red sickle : is it true
They let her off with nothing ?

TAMSON

Well, it's true,
And if that's law at Bodmin, it's not law
Out of the Bible.

ANN

It is just and right,
As well as law. They said the girl was mad,
And the girl was mad, for that minute ; yes,
And for those days that followed, black with pain
And darkness without memory, when she lay
And felt a seven months' child struggle and run
Out of the grave and prison of its life
Into the grave. The mother in her blood
Turned all her blood to folly and blind rage ;
And when she struck, it was the little hands
That groped about her heart and made her strike.

JANE

She killed the man.

ANN

I know she killed the man.
Why do you judge her harder than the law ?
What's madness, if that is not madness ? Why,
Are you afraid of her ?

JANE

No, I'm not afraid.

ANN

But you'll not go to her, and take her hand,
When she comes back to us from Bodmin gaol ?
She'll seem, not the same Mary as she was,
But some new wicked stranger ?

TAMSON
As she is.

ANN
I say there is no difference ; as she was
So she is still, and ever will be so.
It's only that some chasm has crumbled down
Between her old life and this new scarred life.
Do you not see that nothing ever changes
Because we change our name for it ? The same
Mary with the same silent thinking face,
Paler perhaps, and tighter at the lips
Will step out presently and come to us,
As if the sickle in her hands had whitened
Only upon the patient necks of corn.

TAMSON
The Bible says : " They that take up the sword
Shall perish by the sword ; " the law says no.
The law pities : that's well and good ; but here,
Where Peter Corin's mother can't forgive,
Is she to be forgiven ?

ANN
Tamson, if I
Who scarcely can set bite to sup for those
My John left fatherless, had room at home
And bread upon the shelf, I wouldn't say
One word the old man taught me, but I'd say,
" Mary, poor soul, there's room for you at home,
Come home and share the children's bread with them ;"
Only, I must not, for there's none to spare.

TAMSON

Thank God for it. Not if I'd all the barns
In Ruan parish should she darken door
Or share the bread-crumb of a child of mine.

JANE

It's not to be expected, Tamson.

ANN

Go.
Here's Richard running up the Helston road:
He sees the coach: she's coming. I stay here,
Because I must: God help us all! But go.

[TAMSON *and* JANE *go out.*

SAILOR [*to* VILLAGERS]

Who's that you say? the girl who killed the man
Last year at harvest? Coming by the coach?
Why, I'm in luck to see her. Let's sit down
By that old man who looks as drugged asleep
As any moth by day, and talk of it.

FIRST VILLAGER

He is her father.

SAILOR

The Lord forgive my tongue!

RICHARD [*running up*]

It's coming, it's coming. [*To* MICHAEL] Michael, they are here.

[*The coach drives up, stops, and the passengers begin to get out, and the luggage to be taken down from the top. Ladders are brought, and the horses unharnessed, and led away. Some of the villagers go up to their friends who have got out, and go away together. Others stand as if waiting.* MARY *is the last to get out. Many stare at her but none speak.*

SECOND VILLAGER

How late you are!

FIRST PASSENGER [*a girl*]

Where's mother?

SECOND VILLAGER

Safe at home.
She sent me down to meet you.

SECOND PASSENGER [*a woman*]

I've not brought
A thing of all the things you sent me for.

THIRD PASSENGER [*a young woman*]

She's there.

THIRD VILLAGER

Who, Mary? Where is she?

THIRD PASSENGER

She took
The inside corner. No one spoke to her,
Of course. She never spoke. She shouldn't come
With decent folk as if she had the right.

SAILOR

Is that the girl?

FIRST VILLAGER

Yes, she that's getting out
The last of all. She waited till the last.
I doubt they wouldn't speak to her.

SAILOR

Poor lass!
She's sick with journeying.

FIRST VILLAGER

Or with shame.

SAILOR

Not shame.
Her eyes see nothing; if they did, I think
They would judge some of us. Where is her child?

First Villager

The child was born in gaol, and died in gaol.
It was born dead.

Sailor

And yet that woman lives!
I never heard the like of it, or saw
The like of that pale woman with those eyes.
It's not for us to judge her, but to go
Out of the sight and judgment of her eyes.

[He goes out, followed by others. The people gradually go in different directions. Mary *stands, holding a bundle, and looking about her. She sees her father; they look straight at one another without speaking.*

Mary

Father!

[She moves a step towards him. Ann *goes up to* Mary *and touches her on the arm.* Mary *turns.*

You I was sure of, Ann. But look!
Father is here.

Ann

Wait, Mary.

Mary

No, no!

ANN

Wait.

MARY

What do you mean?

ANN

He will not speak to you.
Don't go to him.

MARY

How we forget things, Ann,
All of a sudden, things we know so well.
A moment, and I had forgotten everything
But that he was my father and I his child.
Now I remember. Ann, I am so tired.
The journey's over. Why have I come back?

ANN

You have come back for always. You are home.

MARY

Why is he here?

ANN

It is for you he's here;
Only, you know, he must not speak to you.
He has told me what to say. Tell her, he said
(These were his very words) tell her, he said,

That bed and board is hers, and always shall be,
And that his oath is his, and always shall be,
And that he swore he'd never speak to you
And never will until God takes his soul;
For which he prays the Almighty day by day,
As for his daily bread.

MARY

I have prayed that.
That prayer is never answered. I am here.

ANN

Those were the words he said.

MARY

Why am I here?
The prison was a better home to me.

ANN

Never say that.

MARY

It was a better home.
It shut out shame, it shut out all the world.
Why did they give me freedom, to come here
Where silence is a gaoler worse than theirs?

ANN

Mary, if I could help you——

MARY

Why, then, help
Would still be in the world, and things that were
Might be as if they were not. There's no help.

ANN

My dear, I've suffered for you, nights and nights,
Lying awake, when all the valley wind
Pours like a spring-tide on a groaning beach;
I've waited for you to come back again,
The same that you were always; and you come,
So broken and so weary; and yet, now
There's nothing I can do to help you, nothing.

MARY

No, there is nothing.

ANN

There are those that could
And will not. O those Christian consciences
That hoard up the poor sorrows of the world,
And call them sins! I've little doubt you sat
From Helston here to Ruan in the coach
And not a soul that used to know you seemed
To know you now, or spoke to you.

MARY

O, no!
But I was glad of that.

ANN

Then these that came
Out of their cottages to see you come——

MARY

They came to see me ?

ANN

Ay, to see you come,
But not to say " God bless you," seeing you ;
Not to hold out a hand.

MARY

They're not here now :
Father is here, and yet he is not here.
And I am tired : let me sit down and think.

[*She sits down on the step of the coach and stares at the ground.*

ANN

Don't think too much, Mary : it does no good.

MARY

I learned to think the day my child was born
And the day after, while they buried him.

ANN

Well for you that he died!

MARY

No, ill for me.
I should have come back humble, fit to live;
I am proud and tired, and only fit to die.

ANN

You were proud always; but some weariness
Has broken down your pride.

MARY

Ay, broken it,
So that it lives, and cries out with the pain.

ANN

How did you live through all this misery?

MARY

First like a stone, then like a thinking thing,
That lives and weighs evil and good, and says:
I have been blind, but justice is blind too,
If this is justice that has come on me.

ANN

The law was merciful.

MARY

The law? I mean
The justice that made women and made men.

ANN

What sort of justice?

MARY

That which gave a woman
A body to be loved, and gave a man
The power to love a woman; and then gave
A man the power not to forget the woman
But only to forget love. Why, that justice.

ANN

You had nothing to repent of?

MARY

All the past
Was like a thing worn out and put away,
Not to be thought of any more; I seemed
To drift with present time as with a tide,
And there was no beginning and no end,
And when I thought, and tried to stop the tide
By thinking, I was clutching at a weed
That the tide carried; and I hardly knew
If I were tide or seaweed or some dream
Of sea-birds gibbering at an ashen moon.

[MARY *looks up slowly, and draws a deep breath.*

ANN

Why do you breathe so deep ?

MARY [*rising*]

I do not know.
I breathe the wind, and it awakens me,
And it is like a memory. What is it ?
I shall remember soon. I have not felt
The sea-salt and the heather-honey wind
Since—ah, since I was reaping in the field.

ANN

It is the wind that comes across the downs,
It comes out of the sea beyond the downs,
An evil sea-wind.

MARY

It is awakening me.
Do you know, Ann, that if you think a thing
And then forget it, and you go again
To where you had the thought, you find it there,
Waiting for you. I have come back again
Where all I did, not thought, was done ; and now
I find it all before me as it was,
Not as I saw it then, but as it was,
The truth of it, the truth of what I did.
All I have done I did because I must ;

I knew not why I did it: now I know.
I see myself, my father, and the man
I killed because I loved him——

ANN

No, don't say
These idle words!

MARY

I loved him, and I killed him
Because I loved him, and he had made my love
A thing impossible while he lived. There is
A hidden cruelty in love that turns
Only against the thing it loves the best.
I loved my lover and my father loves me:
And that is why we kill each other: I
The body, he the soul.

ANN

Stop, Mary!

MARY

No.
I honour my father: let him honour me.
He never doubted he was in the right:
If he could but believe I was right too!

ANN

How could that be, Mary? He still cries out
Upon the sickle and upon his hands
Because they sharpened it, and calls his hands
Helpers of sin, and calls for punishment;
So that there is a joy in him to have
His punishment in you under his roof.

MARY

Now I know what he is and what I am.
He'll save his soul: I have to save my soul
That he would kill for love and righteousness.
And now I know that, though I have come back,
I never shall go back to him. Ann, Ann,
He judges harder than the law.

ANN

He does;
He judges by his Bible.

MARY

That's not true!
The Bible! "Judge not that ye be not judged!"
I only know the Bible has said that.

ANN

He judges as he thinks his Bible says.

MARY

He judges for himself: so be it! but I,
I have myself to judge by. There is some law,
It may be, shall set both to rights some day.
Only not now.

ANN

There can't be two things true,
Mary; you've done the thing you've done: God knows
You have suffered, and the law has pardoned you,
As God will: but you haven't got the right
To stand up as you stand and answer him.
Say, God forgive me, I was mad. He will.
But don't say: I was right.

MARY

Shall I not say
Father was wrong, father has done me wrong?
Has he not sold my happiness and his
For heavy, empty syllables that weigh
False in the balances? There's sin, a name,
Justice, a name, repentance, right and wrong,
Names; he would hold them in his hand, and stand
Like a proud, ignorant child clutching his toys,
In God's place, more inflexible than God.
Yet to himself, the idea of his soul,
He has been true, and I to my own soul.

ANN

What are you saying, Mary? He looks up,
And he is listening.

MARY

I gave myself for love.
And I rejoice because I have known love.
It was for love, because I have known love,
I killed my lover, and because I was
A woman, and the mother of his child :
There also I have nothing to repent.
And always all my sorrow and this grief
Have come to me out of the terrible joy
That is the root of love ; ay, and because
I am a woman : there's no love that lacks
Such sorrow, nor no woman. If we sin,
The very earth sins with us, and our life
Cries against things that are.

ANN

He has heard all,
And seems as if he'd speak.

MARY

All's over now ;
I am alone ; there's nothing to be done,
Nowhere to go, no corner of the earth
To creep into ; only, I will be free,
Not accept any bondage, and not stoop
Under a roof that grudges me or set
My lips to any bread of penitence.

ANN

God help you, Mary !

MARY

Hush! what was that?
Do you not hear? 'Tis Vecchan. My one friend!
[VECCHAN *is heard singing*]
Dance with the moon in heaven!
Old winter was a-cold;
But the young Spring is coming in
In purple and cloth of gold.
[*She runs in gaily, dressed more fantastically than ever, goes up to* MARY *and kisses her.*

VECCHAN

Why have you loitered till the sun is burnt out,
And there's no more harvest, and the reaping is over?
I have been waiting for you in the heat and the cold,
And I have been sad and merry, and the clock went on,
And you have never come to me: do you not love me any longer?
Have you come to me now? I have been waiting because I love you;
But it is time now: will you not come home with me?
Come away, come away now.

MARY

Do you not see,
Ann, she has come because I wanted her?
I did not know, but she and the winds knew.
And she has come to me with all her flowers;
There's heather here; give me the heather, Vecchan.
It smells of salt and honey, the old smell.

Nothing is changed here ; all the world but I
Seems to stand still, and I come back to it.
You're still my friend, Vecchan ! and is there still
The downs and the mud cottage on the downs,
The same still, Vecchan ?

VECCHAN

The witch-lady in heaven
Told me that you were coming, and all is ready.
Why have you been so long ? You have been so long
That the moths have eaten windows in the silk
And you can see the brightness of the walls
That are of gold and silver and precious stones.
But that we will say is the court fashion. Come with me :
Come with me, Mary, my father is a King.

MARY

Do you hear, Ann ? All that she says is truth,
Nothing but truth : she makes the yellow gorse
Pure gold with loving it : why should not I
Who have seen through so many lean old lies
Believe no wisdom and no foolishness
Outside her happy folly ?

VECCHAN

Then you will come ?

MARY

Yes, I will come.

ANN

Stop, Mary. Think again.
Here stands your father: he will take you in.
And here stands Vecchan: this kind innocent
Begs hardly more than bread for her own mouth.
You will be homeless, houseless, penniless,
Alone.

MARY

No, not alone: I shall be free;
As Vecchan is.

VECCHAN

Then you will come, you'll come?

MARY

Yes, I will come.

[She turns slowly to her father and goes a few steps towards him.

But you, you have to know
That I, who stand here homeless, have yet done
No evil, but things evil have been done,
And I must bear them. I have found out at last
What life is, and it is not what you said;
And what I am, I made myself, not you;
And though you, you, have broken up my life,
I can escape you: I have found a way:
There is a door, and Vecchan opens it.
You are an old man sitting by the wall,

And it is you would tie me by the hand
And call it pity, and tie me by the foot
And call it justice, and you would give me bread,
And let me hate the bread, and call the bread
Kindness ; and you would let me slowly die
Of justice, pity, kindness ; and sit there
Crumbling away silently like the wall.
You are an old man, and you have done me wrong,
But I am young still, and I will work and live.
You were my father. I have a sister now :
Vecchan shall be my sister. Come, there's wind
Upon the downs ; and she knows all the winds
As well as any seagull. We'll begone
Out of the midst of you that bolt your doors
And shutter out the night. We will go home.

[*She takes* VECCHAN'S *hand, and they go out together.* ANN *stands looking stupidly from* MARY *to* MICHAEL. MICHAEL *rises, totters a few steps towards* MARY, *and then falls on his knees, and raises his hands.*

MICHAEL

Lord, Lord, if she were right, if she were right !

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Printed in Great Britain by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld.,
London and Aylesbury.